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# The Governor

AND  
OTHER STORIES

By *GEORGE A. HIBBARD*

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NEW YORK  
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1892

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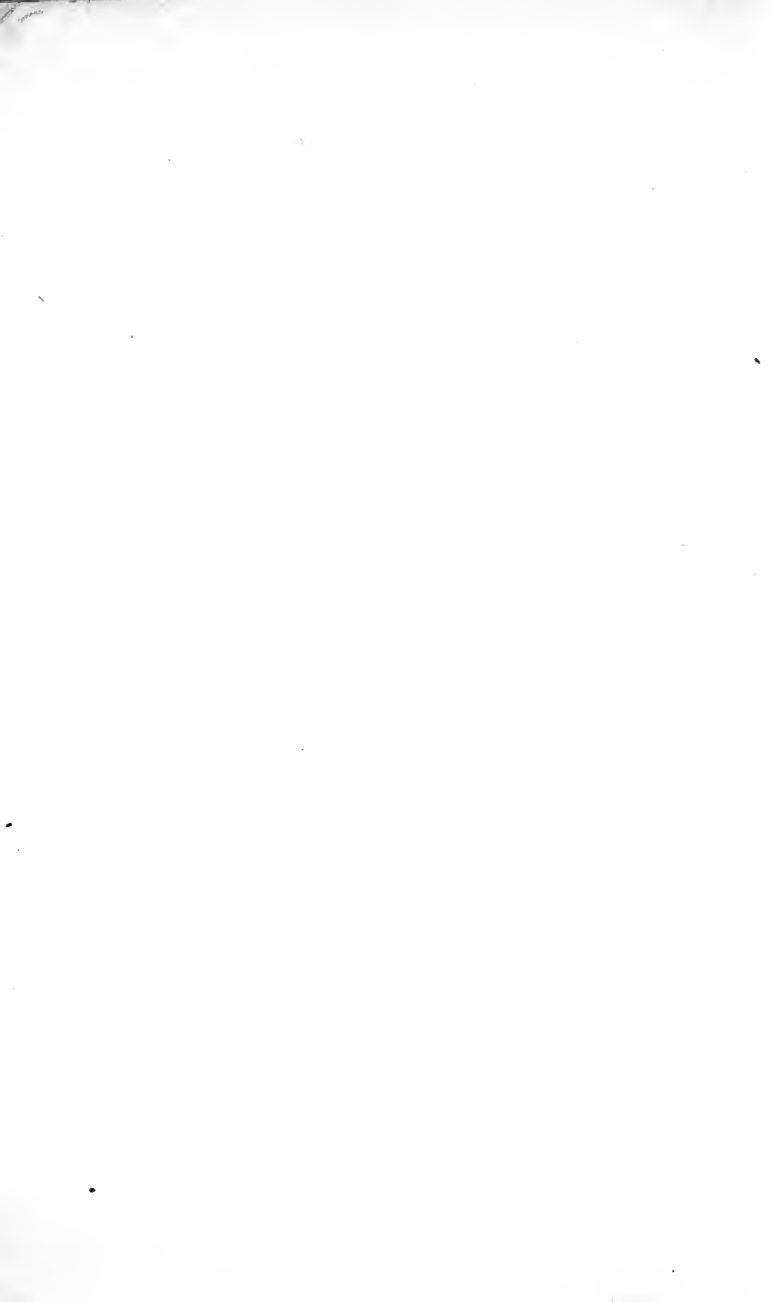
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THE GOVERNOR

*AND OTHER STORIES*



Abby Lou Waterman. 1893-5-3

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BY

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# THE GOVERNOR



## THE GOVERNOR

THE sleek, spirited horses picked their scornful way up the avenue, held in restive subjection by the impassive coachman—stouter than his companion, the footman—fresh-faced, clean-shaven, solid upon the box and apparently oblivious of all greatness save his own, as a coachman should be. The glossy carriage, almost noiseless in its slow motion, held only a grim, gray-haired old man. Many eyes were bent upon him. Pedestrians paused to look at him. The occupants of other carriages broke short their conversations, and turned to catch another glance as he passed. Here and there a hat was lifted. Without change of expression, however, except when the light of personal recognition occasionally lit up his face and he half automatically returned a bow, the tall, thin, commanding, much noticed and most noticeable personage sat almost motionless.

Thirty - nine years before, he had entered the city a boy of twenty, with scarce money enough in the pocket of his coarse, ill-fitting coat to pay for a week's subsistence. It was an afternoon like this, and the wealth and fashion of the town then, as to-day, glittered along this same avenue. Then, as now, he looked away up the broad street, bordered by stately buildings, at the glistening carriages flowing in counter-currents up and down ; at the scattered hundreds upon the sidewalks ; at the whole animated scene, all given tone by the mellow autumnal sunshine. How different it all was and yet how much the same. He had envied them then, with the feverish, impatient, unreasoning hatred of unsatisfied ambition. He had sworn then, that he would possess more than any of them possessed ; command more than any of them controlled. And he had kept to that resolve, through all the thirty-nine years ; that resolve, that was, after all, only a renewal of another resolve made once before. He thought now with almost pitying contempt of the impetuous fashion in which the first had been made ; of the eager impulse with which, that summer afternoon under the old willow, he threw down the book

that he had been reading and vowed that he too would win power, fame, and wealth. In what exaltation, in what passion of the moment he had made his resolution.

"I wonder," and the thin, close-drawn lips for the first time approached change of expression—a slight smile that was quickly gone, flickering over them, "I wonder if I can find the marks of my blows upon the old tree, when, with only the possibility of mere physical exertion to satisfy my longing for immediate action, I pounded its twisted trunk with a fallen branch until I was tired."

There was a block at an intersecting street, and the carriage, pausing on the cross-walk, brought its occupant within ear-shot of the knot of people waiting for the way to clear.

"The Governor. They call me the Governor. The Governor. And the Governor of a pivotal State. The newspapers I see grow stronger about it every day. It may come to me—it has come to others—to me, as things come to those who—go to meet them. And I am rich, richer than I ever dreamed I should be. I've a right to my holiday if ever a man had—the first in forty years."

He drove out of the avenue into the park.

The wheels ran with softer, hollower roll upon the smoother road. The rattle of the harness was more noticeable. The hoofs of ridden horses in rhythmic beat could be distinctly heard. The stream of humanity poured here with hurrying pulsation, and lagged there with slower eddy.

"I'll go back and look at my own past, my own youth. I'll go back to the old place. I wonder if it will be greatly changed. I wonder if I shall find any of them there—after forty years? No doubt—held there by the insidious strength of habit, effortless, almost brainless in the stupefying turn of slow, dull routine. Yes, I will go back. It is a whim, almost a romantic folly—but I've a right to it. I haven't done so many senseless things in my life that I haven't a right to do this one."

And so disconnectedly, and with frequent interruption as attention was caught by what he saw or overheard, ran the Governor's thoughts as he drove on—the man whose slow, steady, inexorable advancement, never retarded by over-scrupulous method, never impeded by even the record of many an obstruction thrown some times relentlessly in wreck out of his path, made him one of the most remarkable figures



of the day—the man who now, sanctified by success, had reached unquestioned eminence throughout the land.

Shadows steal across the country from the west—renegade deserters of the day, seeking to join the main body of invading darkness advancing from the east. A train has just arrived at the small station—a platform and a shed merely—which is the stopping-place, on this particular line, nearest to the village of Farmstead. Two passengers only alight. One an old man, tall and spare, the Governor, who, the day before, as he drove along, had so held the gaze of the avenue, where there were so many and so much to attract attention; the other a trim, decent-looking, middle-aged person, who, as the two stepped from the train, unfolded a light overcoat with the easy, unobtruding care that indicates the watchful and skilful servant.

There was the sound of empty milk-cans hastily set down, and then the conductor raised his hand to the engineer, leaning, pipe in mouth, from his cab. The train started, and, grumbling dissatisfaction at having been stopped at all, steams down the track. There are the usual

surroundings ; the gallows - like affair giving warning of the railroad crossing ; a pile of empty barrels ; a freight-car or two on a side-track, with doors wide open.

The Governor, shading his eyes with one hand from the rays of the sinking sun, looked long and earnestly over the country, from which rose the heavy, sweet perfume of a warm autumn day.

"Nothing—nothing at all like," he mutters, and then, reassuringly, "but I was seldom here. There was no railroad in my time."

But still he did not move. The warm ultramarine, in the west, was shrinking into a cold, delicate green, and soon the horizon would become a dull, glowing yellow. The platform was already deserted. There was but one vehicle in sight—a one-horse wagon into which a boy was loading the clattering, dented, brass-rimmed milk-cans. The Governor was a little impatient—was growing angry in fact, with the indefensible, wholly unreasonable irritation natural to gentlemen of his years. How could he get to Farmstead ? Why was there no means of conveying travellers thither ?

"Do you want anybody ?" said some one in a thin, youthful voice behind him. The Gov-

ernor turned and found himself face to face with the boy, who, having finished loading the wagon, had mounted to the platform. With feet wide apart he stood looking at the Governor. He was fresh-faced, round-cheeked, sturdy. His attire verged upon raggedness—not the raggedness of poverty, but the natural raggedness of healthy boyhood. He looked at the tall, grave man before him with a steady, straightforward stare, free, however, from both assurance and embarrassment.

“I want some means of getting to Farmstead,” answered the Governor.

“Going there myself,” replied the boy, not too smartly and with a good-humored friendliness. “I’ll take you over if you like. If you don’t go with me I guess you’ll have to walk. Many don’t come by this road, and the stage isn’t sent over here. Want to come?”

He glanced up smiling, and the Governor nodded his assent.

“Does he want to come too?” continued the boy, jerking his thumb in the direction of the servant busy with the luggage. The Governor nodded again.

“I guess there’s room for the lot of you,” answered the boy, cheerfully.

"Williams," said the Governor, "take the bags and get in behind."

The vehicle was of the kind once known as a carry-all, with a straight, stiff stick rising at each corner to support a hard, flat roof. The leather tags by which the curtains were upheld flapped raggedly, giving it an altogether dog-eared appearance, and the rusty iron-work and splashed wheels and body told of long and hard usage. It was not a luxurious or even a very comfortable turn-out. But the Governor was very glad to make use of it.

"There," said the boy, after he had jumped into the wagon himself, "give me your hand. Now then."

The Governor so aided stepped on the muddy hub, climbed slowly up and seated himself beside the boy on the front seat.

"Most people come by the new road that goes right through the village," said the boy, after they had started.

"Ah," responded the Governor.

"Go 'long," said the boy to the horse.

If the Governor had ever attempted to form any such mental picture, he probably would not have imagined himself returning to the home of his childhood in this fashion. As his

thoughts ran when he drove up the crowded, noisy, glittering avenue, so his thoughts ran now as the staid old horse drew him slowly along the silent, shadowy country road. The nearer he came to Farmstead, the more distinct became his memories. He remembered things—often surprisingly trivial things—that he had not thought of for years. The aspect of the trees, the lines of the fences, he recollected—sometimes with singular clearness. And the people—he had not seen any of them for forty years—yet he could remember exactly how many of them looked. He wondered what had become of the old school teacher, and of all the boys with whom he had gone to school. What had become of Joliffe—Joliffe of whom he had not thought for so long a time, although once he had thought of him often enough. And with this memory his features became suddenly even more severe and then quickly relaxed into an expression almost of eager pleasure. Joliffe! How that name brought back the past. It was jealousy of him, as much as anything else, that had led to the famous resolve by the willows, nearly half a century ago. Jealousy—absolute jealousy he thought. For then Joliffe had seemed

blessed with all the favors of fortune. Only a country doctor's son, yet the holder of almost all the prizes of that humble life. Jealousy finds its cause not only in what others have, but in what we have not, as well. And Joliffe was the possessor of so much that was desired, and the representative of so much more only imagined. "How I should like to give him a twinge of regret, of envy," thought the Governor. "If I could but make him realize the pettiness of his own life and the power of mine, that would repay me for the hours of boyish misery he caused me. Has not someone said that we do our meanest acts on account of those we most despise? Should anyone know that I, after forty years, still feel resentment against the insignificant son of a country doctor, he would think me contemptibly beneath contempt."

"I don't do this sort of thing every day," volunteered the boy, finally, looking back at the cans. "They are pretty busy at home," pausing to see if his companion caught the full significance of his words; "I did it as a particular favor."

"Indeed," said the Governor, absently.

"Yes," continued the boy, disappointed that

he had made no deeper impression. "You see they are going to have a wedding, and they've got a good deal to do getting ready. Somebody had to get the cans, and I said I'd do it."

He flapped the reins on the back of the horse, and for a moment, was apparently lost in the contemplation of his own condescension. "I didn't much like to do it, 'cause there's so much going on at home. Say," he exclaimed, "you aren't one of his relations, are you?"

"Whose?" asked the Governor, blankly.

"Mr. Lysle's, who's going to marry Sue."

"No," confessed the Governor, almost humbly, "I am not."

"I thought you might be," said the boy. "There's a good many of them been coming lately."

There was silence for a few moments.

"You know the place—the people about here pretty well?" asked the Governor, abruptly.

"I was born here," replied the boy, with a fine scorn which the oldest inhabitant could not have excelled.

"Do you know anybody by the name of Joliffe?" the Governor demanded.

"Joliffe!" and the boy opened his eyes wide

with astonishment, and twisted himself in hilarious contortion. "Why, my name's Joliffe, John Joliffe. It's my father's name, too. Ever seen father?"

"Yes," answered the Governor, slowly; "he's a physician, isn't he?"

"Why certainly, father's a doctor. He's retired though. You get sick around here and you'll find out that he's the doctor, if you can get him. He's a great doctor, he is. No one can give you worse-tasting things than he can."

"No doubt—no doubt," murmured the Governor, utterly unconscious of what he was saying or to what he replied. "And so," he thought, "Joliffe has lived on here. I suppose the slim boy—by the way how much this boy looks as he did—I'm surprised I did not notice it at once—has become a coarse, overfed, country dullard. Married early, of course—I never have found time for that, early or late." Then, turning to the boy again, he asked:

"How old are you?"

"Twelve and a half," answered the driver, promptly. "I'm the youngest."

"Any brothers?"

"Two."

"Sisters?"



"Three."

"Of course," thought the Governor, "Joliffe was the very man to have such a family—a ruminant, a calm-lived bovine."

"Sue's the third oldest," continued the boy, his desire for conversation causing him to forget his haste and to suspend his chirruping and clucking at the horse.

"And she's to be married?"

"Married to-morrow to Mr. Lysle," responded the youngster, meditatively. "He isn't a bad sort of fellow, and I used to like him first-rate."

"You liked him?" The Governor was surprised at the interest he took in the matter, and at the number of questions he asked.

"Before Sue said she'd have him, he used to give me a lot of things. Somehow he don't now."

"I should like to see your father," said the Governor, suddenly. "If you will take me to your house, my servant will walk on to the hotel and have a wagon sent for the bags and myself."

"It's more than a mile," said the boy.

"Why," said the Governor, with some surprise, "I thought that you lived in the village."

"Oh," cried the boy, "you've been here before. But that was the old house, before father gave up practice. We live now in the one just outside, that used to be the minister's house, and that father fixed over. You wouldn't know it, there's been such a lot done to it."

"I was born there," thought the Governor. And then, with a sudden contraction of the brow, "I had forgotten all about it. I wish I hadn't. I might have bought it. I'd rather that Joliffe did not have it—John Joliffe, of all men."

"My father's a rich man," continued the boy. "Are you?"

He looked at the Governor with clear, unabashed eyes, that held no evidence of consciousness of the impropriety of the question. His unembarrassed innocence made a direct answer even natural and proper.

"Some people think so," answered the Governor.

"But are you?" persisted the boy.

"Yes."

"Very?"

"Very."

"I don't believe you are as rich as he is."

"Possibly not," responded the Governor.

The light had diminished. The lulling sounds of the coming twilight, the quelled noises of the field, the rustle of the trees scattered along the highway, the slight clash in one place where some stalks of corn were left standing in their ripened leaves—like Arabs in their loose-hanging robes—all deepened by a multitude of dim, half-realized associations, softened the hour to the Governor, as they now drove silently along. The occasional lowing of distant cattle, clearer than it could have been earlier in the year, the boom of a night-hawk swooping down, the small, shrill, stridulous pipings in the bedusted bushes—the Governor heard it all—heard it with that finer sense with which present perception has but little to do. A grove cast deep shadows across the road. It ended abruptly, and they came in sight of a large house, perhaps half a mile distant.

“That’s our house,” said the boy. “Our farm’s back of it.”

“How very much changed,” mused the Governor. And then as they came nearer he saw it—the house in which he was born—and Joliffe owned it and had changed it to what it was. Modern architecture had made of it one of those structures now scattered in

such number through the country, which, in ready adaptability, in evident comfortableness, and in relieving picturesqueness appeal pleasantly to the eye and to the mind. It had been painted a deep red. It was low and with low-hanging eaves ; broad balconies ran around all parts visible from the road. With its many chimneys it was easy to see that it had many rooms. Evident prosperity dwelt therein. No one could doubt that broad halls ran through it ; that in many of its rooms there was place for the stir of happy life, in others, for stillness and peace. It was something much more than walls and roof. It was a home, where children could be joyous in sunshiny spring days, and where sorrow could be softened to men and women, when autumn winds tore through clashing branches—a home consecrated beneath the changing hands of human gladness and grief.

They passed through the gateway, over which two great elms—one on each side—dropped their branches. These were changed, grown larger, but the Governor recollected them. They were the first things that he remembered altogether, and the sight of the trees filled him with a strange, troubled joy.

They rattled up to the side veranda. The

horse stopped of his own accord. The boy jumped out. A couple of dogs tore around a corner of the house, and one of them putting his paws upon the boy's shoulders licked his cheek. A puppy tumbled along. The boy caught it up and with a hand under each shoulder, held it out for the Governor's inspection; smiled, shook his head in negative upon the claims of all others to equal this puppy, and then placed it upon the piazza, where it sat solemnly, its eyes fixed upon a dead grasshopper, as if it comprehended at least six modern philosophies.

A half-dozen boys and girls of young Joliffe's own age were at full run across the lawn toward him.

"Go away, everyone of you," cried the boy as the racing group reached him. "What!" and he stooped to hear what the youngest was eager to whisper. "You don't mean to say they're going to have that!"

"Lots of it," said one, evidently aware of the subject of the confidence.

"I say," cried young Joliffe, at last becoming conscious of the duties of hospitality. "I've got to find father. There's a gentleman here wants to see him. Cephas!"

A brisk young fellow appeared whom the boy, it was evident, delighted to think he domineered, and with quick glance at the Governor, gathered the reins in one hand while with the other he turned the horse by the bit and led him down a short lane bordered with huge butternut-trees, toward the stables, half hid by the descending ground, a troop of marauding turkeys, just in from a day's scout, scattering out of the way.

The children all turned and gazed at the Governor with the frank unconcealed interest of youth often so disconcerting. He who had so many times borne the stare of curious crowds without confusion, felt suddenly embarrassed; he who had so often received important and importunate committees; who had ruled the stormiest of national conventions; who had poured words in abundant flow over packed thousands, could find nothing to say. He seemed to himself awkward, clumsy. If Williams had not at that moment asked him about the luggage and given him an opportunity to answer with grim, relieving severity, he would hardly have known what to do.

"Will you come in, sir?" asked the boy, the consciousness of the dignity of his posi-

tion sobering his speech, "or will you sit here?"

The Governor preferred to sit on the veranda. The boy had been gone but a moment, his companions following him, when a young girl stepped out of an open window, and—evidently she did not know there was anyone there—walked toward him. Stealthily as the image steals out upon the negative under the alchemy of the chemicals, but still with almost instantaneous action, another figure took form before the Governor's inner sight, another figure, like this one,

"A child of nature's rarest making,  
Wistful and sweet and with a heart for breaking."

Where were those forty years? He felt a sudden, startling contraction of the heart. The same, almost the very same—slight, but with the slightness of pliant strength; the sun-burnished hair; the eyes so possessed with happiness; and—the very dress the same, the light lingering that it might fall upon the clinging white stuff. Can a rock drink in the dawn of a spring morning, and hold it in unyielding fastness for many years; were such the deli-

cacy, the truth, the tenacity of an old man's memory? She was even twisting a piece of blue ribbon between her fingers as he had seen that other do so long before.

"I thought the children were here," said the girl, a little startled, a little puzzled, as her eyes fell on the stranger. "Do you wish to see anyone?"

"Doctor Joliffe," said the Governor.

She stood turning the ribbon with a certain shyness, for she realized that the man before her was not one of the many who insisted upon coming to the old doctor for advice though he had so long been out of practice. And then a man's voice, positive, rich, of generous amplitude, was heard in the house.

"There he is," she said. "I will call him."

But upon the instant, he who had spoken stepped upon the veranda. He was a man of that sturdy strength so rarely found at his age, and which, when found, is so impressive, telling as it generally does of a healthy, active, untroubled life. For the man was old. He had white hair, whiter even than the Governor's, whose hair was a dull, heavy gray. He was old, but still he stepped with an alertness which showed that years had no more impaired



his spirit than they had weakened his voice. He walked rapidly toward the Governor.

"Do you want to see me?" he said. "Do you? I'm invisible, positively invisible. I've got a wedding to look after." He glanced involuntarily at the young girl, who instantly found a new interest in the landscape. "A man's got a right to be let off on an excuse like that—a wedding's better than Fourth of July or Christmas, it doesn't come anything like once a year."

The same laugh—a laugh over forty years older and yet the same. It was that laugh, so round, so broad, so full from centre to vanishing outskirt, so filled with the satisfaction that derides all dissatisfaction, that had been such exasperation, such provocation, such an irritant, to the restless, envious, ambitious boy so long ago. How he had despised the light temperament that shook out such laughter, as you shake the blossoms from a thorn-bush in the spring! How, when too young and too inexperienced to conceal the aspirations that then seemed so absurd to all but himself, how the wild rhodomontade of his boyhood was checked and chilled by that very laugh! And now, when he heard it again after forty years, did

it not carry the same aggravation, the same torment? Was it petulant querulousness that another could still be apparently so vacant-mindedly happy that troubled him; or was it dissatisfaction, rising in revolt against himself, with what he was, with all that he had earned and got? There was a flash of the same old fierce envy that had burned in his boy's heart. Envy of what? Must he seek rehabilitation in himself because a country doctor, beaming with common happiness, rotund with common prosperity, laughed loudly in his every-day house? Was it envy handed down from his former self, like an heirloom in a family, through the line of changes that he thought were in himself; or was there no such change? Was the laugh that had helped to fuse together and anneal those discordant desires, hatreds, determinations, abilities, passions, qualities of heart, into a character dominated by an all-powerful ambition, now as then something to make him scorn what was his—the very superlatives of the world—wealth, power, celebrity? Could this man, who possessed but the every-day excellences of existence, thus render his own possessions almost contemptible in his own sight?

So lag the words struggling to express all that the Governor's thoughts spanned in an instant—so do mere words lag and fail.

He had determined not to announce himself so soon. But he was impatient, half angry with himself. If he spoke, would he not be satisfied?

"You do not know me?" he said, holding out his hand.

Joliffe did not answer at once. He looked at the Governor in that doubtful, conscious way in which, fearful of committing a rudeness, we look at those demanding recognition and of whom we have no memory. But the trace of doubt in his smile quickly vanished, as he broke into a laugh.

"Not know you!" he shouted. "Not know you," and he caught the Governor's right hand in his own left and struck his own right into the Governor's. "I didn't at first. Time does his work well if you give him forty years. But I know you now, and it does my soul good to shake hands with you. How in the world did you get here?"

The Governor explained. He added that the young gentleman was to drive him over to the hotel as soon as the milk-cans had been

unloaded, or, he concluded, if it was not far he would walk.

"Hotel!" cried the doctor. "Much you'll see of the hotel," and he stepped to the corner of the piazza. "Cephas!" he called, and the young man appeared running to answer the summons.

"Take those bags into the house," commanded the doctor.

The two old men stood silently gazing at one another.

"You look well," said the Governor, at last.

"If you don't worry the world, it won't worry you. Now you have worried it a good deal."

"And show it," responded the Governor, grimly.

"We know all about you up here," Joliffe went on. "Because we're a little out of the way you must not think that we don't keep our eyes pretty sharply on what is going on."

"I've no doubt," replied the Governor.

"We only stand aside."

"You always did, Joliffe."

"Yes, Governor," replied the doctor. "I always took the world easily. You didn't. You always had a grudge against it. You hated it

as an enemy to be conquered. You hated it, but still you were always bound to succeed in it."

"Success," responded the Governor in his severest tones, "is the only revenge we can take on the world."

"That sounds like you," said Joliffe, looking curiously at the man before him. "Only the edge instead of dulling has grown keener. But come, you must see the rest of us."

The Governor followed the doctor along the veranda and around the corner. On a lawn stretching beside the house, young people were flying about, not even noticing the new arrival, for the game of tennis must be finished before the net and court-lines should be obscured by the darkness. On the veranda, on the steps, and on the gravel walk were yellow-haired youngsters and gray-haired elders—the extremes of age, that find so much in common.

"It is long since I have been here," explained the Governor, as they walked along. "I thought I should like to look over the old ground a little."

"You've come just right. There's nothing like a wedding to brighten up old memories. Even if it's not one of your own that's leaving

you, still you can't help catching something of the spirit of the time."

The Governor glanced uneasily at the tall girl beside his old companion.

"You see we change, in our own slow way, even here," continued the doctor, looking proudly about. "You will hardly know the village."

The two old men slowly approached a group about the doorway. A little apart from the rest, on a long, low chair such as an invalid might use, sat a lady holding back the vines that she might see the conclusion of the game. Her delicate face would instantly have reminded anyone of the young girl whom the Governor had just seen, for despite the many years difference in their ages, the mother's face, besides possessing a striking similarity to the daughter's, held the same expression of bright intelligence and kindly interest. Hearing footsteps, she quickly turned. A smile lit up her delicate features, as her eyes fell first upon her husband.

"Mary," said the doctor, his voice softening, "I bring you an old friend."

It was evident that she knew him at once. And he, no wonder that he started. In her

daughter he had seen her living apparition, and here—ethereal almost, but plainly in steadfast life—here in reality, and more beautiful in the Governor's sight than her likeness in her spring-time, was the woman he had loved nearly half a century ago—whom he had then almost worshipped in the strength of his strong and then not wholly perverted nature; who of all human beings alone had ever had the power, unconsciously exercised, to make him for an instant falter in his purpose, and who alone, that purpose fully resumed, could have had power to awaken in him a question, a regret, a doubt. And Joliffe had won her! She was his, as was also his old home. Strange that he had not known all this before. But was it so strange? He knew that she had not married within the first year, and after that—well he had not taken thought about her after that. Then came a dull ache at his heart, another sharp pang of envy struck at his very being. These were instants of quick retrospection, of sudden recognition. Could it have been that those years were barren, heart-breaking years to her, as they would have been to him perhaps, if he had not been in abject suppression beneath himself. And Joliffe had won her! They had

been rivals here as in so much else, even in childhood, in that bitter rivalry, bitterer perhaps than is ever found in after years, for it is direct, outspoken, untempered by the amenities of life ; but in this rivalry he had never really feared Joliffe. From the very first had not the hundred somethings in which men learn their fate been in his favor ? Did he not know always that they were more than light impulses, casual and passing likings, that bent toward him in the old time, and that told him he had nothing to fear if he would but speak. But he had not spoken. To speak would have been renunciation of ambition, a self-condemnation to village insignificance. He remembered well the morning before he went away. It was much such a morning as to-day's had been, or as to-morrow's might be, an autumn morning, glad in the possessed ripeness of the year, sad in its suggestion of decay. The apples were red upon the orchard trees. The birds held sad family consultation, for they were to leave their homes. The smoke from a near fallow dragged no higher than the low tree-tops, and a man not far distant shouted dully to oxen rebelling under their yoke. And he had talked excitedly with cruel vain-glori-



ousness about his plans, while she gave but little heed to what he said. But had he himself been very heedful of his own words? Was he not thinking how pleasant it would be to tell her all he really felt, and to hear the avowal that he was almost sure must follow—wholly assured as he saw her downcast eyes and sad preoccupation. But he did not speak. And after he had gone—cruel to himself as he had so often since been cruel to so many—her last look, her puzzled, grieved, sorrow-weighted look, had followed him for days and months and years. And so, in another of those instantaneous, all-embracing flashes, not of memory, but of that sudden expansion and enlightenment of the whole being, when one sees, in complete revealment, aspects of life with which time and memory's processes have nothing to do, there came to the Governor a vision of what had been and what might not be.

“We never forget such old friends,” she said, giving him her hand. “I have never forgotten the Governor.”

One by one all were brought up and presented to him—some to find themselves a little awed by the presence of the man of whom they had heard so much. Indeed the Governor

held quite a little reception on the veranda, shaking hands in his most approved, automatic, political fashion.

The supper that night was widely different from the supper that must take place the next night. This was a mere prelude, a mere family affair. To-morrow night the wedding would be over, and all would be there to see the bride depart. But all the Joliffes were there now. Mary, the oldest daughter, was there, with her husband, the editor from St. Louis. Evelyn, too, the second daughter—her husband an officer stationed at Fort Laramie—had only arrived that afternoon. Robert had short leave and was home from Harvard; and Martin, seventeen, from Exeter. Then there were Susan's two best friends—the tall blonde from Salem and the little brunette from Baltimore—and with them Lysle's best man and two ushers. You would have found that Susan was there, and Lysle, if you had looked around; otherwise you might not have noticed them, for they said but little.

At the left of the hostess—the Governor, of course, was at her right—was the lawyer from the village, a trifle deaf, rather interjectional in

style, and with the air of a man, who, if he had made the law, would have made it different in several particulars. The clergyman was not to be seen. The initiate understood that his wife would not let him come, and that she would not come without him. She knew the digestion of that divine to a mouthful, and two such suppers—of course he would be there on the following night—would not do at all. Everywhere, wedged in here, popping up there, were children of all ages. The table was not of the kind that groan beneath the weight of what they bear. Why should it? Had it not upheld the family's hospitality for half a century? It was dressed in its full regalia. The pure white cloth lay as softly as if snowed upon it, and somebody, something, had wrought in its web devices in such delicate tracery as the frost, plying its small implements, works upon the winter panes. It wore all its honors: its old blue, willow-pattern china; its glass insignia of the great order of Thirst; its silver decorations of St. Bounty. And what the table bore could not have been given in any scant *menu*, with epitaph-like, monumental inscription. The madeira, laid down with the port, by the grandfather for great occasions—sev-

eral undecanted bottles lay on the sideboard, as thickly encrusted as might be the backs of hippopotami just above water with sunburned clay—the madeira trudged down one side of the table, while the port, a little tender as to one toe, it might be fancied, travelled up the other. The two old decanters who—not which—had kept the road together as long as the table had done service as a table, moved on sedately, while their clear heads—the decanters could dispense with their heads while on a business tour, and if they were changed it did not matter, so alike were their ideas—lay winking approval at each other, at the doctor's right hand.

Memory is a very strange thing, and plays us very strange tricks. Apparently without adequate cause, there steal at times into our minds half-forgotten fancies, long-unremembered facts, distant scenes, that seemingly have nothing to do with anything about us. As the Governor sat at the table with the home-like realities of this home life around him, he suddenly remembered—what suggested it at that moment he could not for the life of him have told—that once when he was the country's representative abroad, he had been present at a

great review, held after a bloody but successful war, and that he had seen a regiment march past, the gaps made by the fallen left in its ranks. The aspect of these broken lines was now vivid in his memory. He stirred uneasily. What had reminded him of all this? For the first time he wondered if it would have been better not to come. Sitting there at his old rival's table, he wondered if there were such spaces in his life—spaces where, in the conflict, living things had gone down—living things, vital as life itself.

A dance, a mere carpet affair which the young people insisted upon, followed the supper. The doctor's remonstrance was of no effect—his remonstrance that there must be so much to do to-morrow. The oldest daughter played, and once the doctor danced with Susan. The girl, the glad but saddened significance of her future life already stealing upon her—for the tender, joyful, tearful to-morrow drew very near—swam through the dance as if in a happy dream. But Joliffe—what was there to compare with his flow of abundant life, with the light elasticity of his every motion? To be sure his waltzing was somewhat antiquated, but then the astonishing thing was that he

waltzed at all. The dancing, however, of the bridesmaids and ushers quite made up for what might be deficient, and toned down what might be too effusive in the doctor's performance. The children danced too, without respect to time, or place, or remonstrance; danced as dance spots of sunshine upon the sward amid the shadows of breeze-shaken leaves.

The Governor sat quietly beside his hostess. They said but little. His thin lips tightened in rigidity at times, as if drawn together by the strong lines of resolve; but they were lax lines just then—softened as might be the strings of an old Cremona left out in the dew.

As the Governor sat saying nothing, he saw Susie looking at him curiously. She had often, since her sisters' marriages, been her mother's aid at the frequent entertainments of that hospitable house. No one as easily as she could put the awkward at their ease or as pleasantly deal with the idiosyncrasies of the diffident; but now she hesitated. She was accustomed to the weak and the unattractive, the embarrassed and the unpopular, and she felt that it would be almost presumption for her to assume a moment's care of anyone so high and

mighty as the Governor. But something in his look—it must have been his look, for no muscle of his face stirred—encouraged her, and she timidly approached.

“It is a long time since I have been at a wedding,” he said. He was about to add that funerals—the funerals of distinguished fellow-citizens—were almost the only gatherings of his kind, not political or financial, that he had been in the habit of attending. But he did not do it. It seemed to him that it would not sound very well.

“Oh, it is to be so very simple,” she answered; “it will not be like a wedding in the city at all. It was almost too bad to ask the girls to be bridesmaids for only this.”

“They do not seem dissatisfied,” remarked the Governor, dryly, glancing critically at the quick whirling dance.

“Everyone has been so kind,” responded Susie, enthusiastically, “and I have got such lovely things.”

Of course, thought the Governor, they always give presents to a bride. And he had none. It was strange, how humiliated he felt. However, he remembered with an altogether disproportionate joy, considering the trifling

nature of his difficulty, that here was something that could be remedied.

"I did not know that I was coming to a wedding," he said, apologetically, "and I have nothing. I hope—I believe—that I am none the less welcome."

Susie grew red with sudden confusion. Speaking of her happiness, she almost felt that she was sharing it with others, and in her great gladness and friendliness for all, she had spoken quite frankly and without thought.

"Oh," she exclaimed, confusedly, "I only spoke of them because—because they were a part of the wedding."

"Won't you show them to me?" said the Governor.

He rose and followed her to a room where, on assembled tables, the offerings to the bride were displayed. There was the silver given by Joliffe—forks and spoons in shining array; there were the silver tea-pot, the cream-pitcher, the sugar-bowl from her mother; there were a salad-spoon and fork from an uncle, and a soup-ladle from the lawyer. There was Lysle's gift, a gold necklace with one small gem at the clasp. Lysle's father and mother were dead, and his only living relative was an ancient and



wealthy maiden aunt, an aunt of very aristocratic connections and possessed of a somewhat mysterious, but unquestionably all-puissant influence, that it was hoped at one time might do great things for him; she had not entirely approved of the marriage, and she now sent a bronze thermometer. There were the presents from the bridesmaids: a silver-backed mirror, and a fan with silver monogram. There were the presents from the "best man" and the ushers: a silver jug, silver candlesticks, and a silver inkstand. Then there were bronzes, books, etchings, a throng of pretty things of twisted brass, and carved wood, and dainty stuffs from cousins, friends, and even from old servants. It was not a very grand display—all could not have cost very many hundreds of dollars, and if the Governor had estimated what he saw at its pecuniary value he would not have greatly considered it. But he saw the radiant, triumphant joy of the girl; he noticed with what pride she called his attention to the fact that she had received three sets of coffee-spoons and duplicate sugar-tongs—saw her satisfaction with the somewhat meagre collection, and it seemed to him precious beyond price. He thought of dusty piles of

securities in dark bank vaults ; thought of hideous buildings in crowded city neighborhoods ; thought of all the wealth he possessed, and wondered, if these few gifts could evoke such pleasure, what could not be done with his huge slumbering fortune, busy even while it slumbered in gathering what for the instant seemed like usurious spoil ; wondered if it were not possible to draw a better revenue from some new use of his vast capital than was to be obtained from the very closest, richest, "trust." He had never thought anything of the kind before, and it struck him with the force of a new idea. He thought that he would like to buy her something rare, dazzling, wonderful ; hold it before her astonished eyes, and say to her that it was hers. Then he wondered if, after all, it would give her more pleasure than some of the trifles that he saw.

"And shall you always live here?" he asked, when they had finished the inspection.

"No, indeed," she answered. "We are to live in New York. Jack is in business there."

"And what——" began the Governor.

"He is the cashier of a great firm of brokers in Wall Street."

"Do you know the name of the firm?"

"Ryde & Broxtowe," she answered, proudly. "Perhaps you have heard of them. Jack tells me they are very well known."

"Ryde & Broxtowe," repeated the Governor, looking up with a sharp glance of surprise. "Yes, I have heard of the firm of Ryde & Broxtowe."

"They have such confidence in Jack," she went on, "in his integrity, in his ability;" she thought she had heard these words used in connection with some one who held an office of responsibility, and she now rather shyly employed them. "They wanted—were going to take him into the firm, but one of the troubles came that come so suddenly there, and they got into difficulties and had to be helped by some one, a great capitalist—Jack does not know who—and now they can do nothing themselves, and so can make no change."

"It is strange I have not seen him. I have been at Ryde & Broxtowe's often."

"He has seen you. He told me so to-night."

"Possibly," responded the Governor, absently. "I suppose he was in the outer offices and—and I am afraid that I do not notice very much."

There was silence while Susie made the last

of a long series of experiments in the arrangement of the presents. The photograph frame from her old school-teacher certainly looked best behind the alligator skin portfolio from her Sunday-school class.

"And you are going to live in New York?" said the Governor, at last. "How do you think you will like that?"

"I am sure I shall like it," she answered. "We have taken a flat. It is pretty high up, but I tell Jack that we'll see more sky, and that will be nice for me, for I'm from the country. We shall be very comfortable, and then some day he will be taken into the firm, and then we shall be rich."

"He wishes to be a member of the firm?" asked the Governor.

"Oh, if he could be, it would make him so happy! You see everyone has thought that we ought not to be married now—and though they have all been perfect about it at home, still I can see that they are a little afraid—but of course if he were that, it would settle everything."

"It would settle everything," repeated the Governor, slowly.

She sighed slightly, and the first look of sad-

ness the Governor had seen in her face lay for a moment on her delicate features, but this quickly gave way to a smile, and the Governor turning, discovered Lysle in the doorway.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," he said to Susie. "They are waiting for you for a dance."

"I was showing the—our presents," she said.

"Yes," broke in the Governor. "They are very beautiful. But do not let me keep you any longer."

He followed her as she walked to the door, and when she turned to see if he was not coming with them she found that he was quite near her.

"Young man," said the Governor, somewhat stiffly, "you have youth and you have health, and you have," he paused and glanced at Susie, "you have the best this world can give. You have the three simple elements of happiness, by no means as complex a thing as some suppose. Remember this, that what you have now is more than you can ever reasonably expect to attain—can ever attain, no matter with what expectation. He who in this world does only what the world would call wise is a

fool—a fool. A penny spent, sir, is a penny gained.”

These were singular words for the Governor. They were simple, plain words for one famous for his eloquence ; they were strangely impractical words for one pointed out as the very type of success ; they were even obscure, contradictory words to be uttered by one so cool-headed, cold-hearted as he ; but they were the words the Governor used, turning sharply on his heel when he was done.

“Go and join the dance,” he added, a trifle peremptorily, turning again to Lysle and Susie, who stood gazing at him in great astonishment, “and would you be kind enough to have them send my man Williams to me ? ”

Williams found the Governor in what Joliffe called the “study.” He was writing, and from the yellow paper with printed top and ruled lines that he had taken from his pocket it was easy to see that he was preparing a telegram. It was a long despatch ; he pinned together four sheets, before he affixed his signature.

“This,” he said, handing the papers to Williams, “must go to Ryde & Broxtowe the first thing in the morning. Do you know where the telegraph office is ?—you can find out and

be there when it opens. And be careful to let no one know what you have."

"You see, Governor," said Joliffe, very much out of breath from the dance, as he approached his guest a little later; "there isn't much wisdom in it all, but much happiness."

"But much happiness," repeated the Governor, "and that is something that cannot always be won by wisdom."

They stood for an instant silent.

"You look tired," said the doctor, glancing at the other. "Shall I take you to your room?"

"Yes, the day has been rather too much for me, more than I thought any day could ever be."

"See," said the doctor, as the two men entered a room above stairs, "this is in the old part of the house. I shouldn't be surprised if you knew this place."

They stood for an instant looking curiously at each other in the strong glow of the lamp.

"Joliffe," said the Governor, slowly, at last. "We didn't get on very well when we were boys."

The doctor did not answer.

"Possibly I was the most to blame," continued the Governor. "But no matter now. We have come to an age when we have little but our past. Let us try to forget what was unpleasant in it."

Joliffe understood the halting speech—almost the first of retraction that had ever passed those rigid lips—and held out his hand.

"Good-night," said both, and for the first time in their lives they were friends.

The doctor tramped out of the room, shut the door with a slam, coughed, and went down the stairs with even more noise than usual.

The Governor stood still in deep thought. Had he not in substance asked his old rival's pardon? It certainly was not a thing he had expected to do when he started for his old home. But he felt the better for it. He stepped to the window. Indeed he knew the place now. It was his own old room. The moon had just risen and the broad stretch of country lay before him. It was changed of course. Clumps of trees had disappeared. Here and there buildings he had never before seen were visible in the cold, clear, white light. He, however, recognized much—remembered detail upon detail. The line of the hills lay



there delicate, almost pathetic, against the sky. The sweep of the river was there, always the same. But he had never felt anything like this before—peace-giving and with soothing promise. Many and many a time had he looked out that window, the phantasmagoria of hope in full whirl, with inexperienced ambition throbbing with quick grasping desires for imagined, uncomprehended things; and now he stood there with the bitterness of victory at his heart—stood there the possessor of the pieces of silver, the prices of his own self-betrayal. The realization of the real worthlessness of all things won was upon him—the realization so often, if we could but know it, panged with pain such as defeat, that may leave us our ideals, never brings.

At first the sound of music from the distant dancing-room, sad as a modern waltz can be—is it typical of our half-hearted joyousness that there must even be a plaint in our dance music?—kept him awake; but even when the music ceased, his hurrying thoughts prevented sleep. It was well on toward morning before he fell into what was even then a broken slumber. Who can give account of the occult influences that mingled the experiences of the

day with his last waking ideas, and filled that strange chamber in the house of life with his dream? He was in the old orchard again, the late golden-rod glowing in the sunlight; the ferns shrinking in the shadows. But the peace of a great contentment was upon him, for he had asked and been answered, and the world had nothing more to give. No longer was there any haste, or restlessness, or the leap of mounting ambition. Life was no longer a means, a mere opportunity; it was an attainment, an end adequate in and of itself, explanatory, all-sufficient. He felt what he had never known—the free spaciousness of youth. The lengthening vista of coming years was no longer a succession of prisoning spaces; it was a sweep of graceful arches, each in itself beautiful, bending over a progress, the end of which was the best that life could give. And now scene and circumstance changed with quick magical craft. It was his wedding-day. There were many people; some of them with the faces seen in the evening. There was the bride, white-robed, silent, a little frightened; there he was himself, awkward, self-important, proud, happy. And then the church, cool, dim, shadow-trodden; the wedding march wandering

from stiff pew to stiff pew, stealing, peeling along the narrow aisle and low gallery. And from outside came the glad laughter of the tumbling bell. Now came years, changing in season, but, as the course of nature, fully foreseen, assuring, satisfying. Children were born and one died, but a kindly growth covered the wound as the closing wood grows where the lightning stroke has torn the green tree trunk. And he grew old—for time and place are but for the fleshly self, they have no denizenship in the realm of dreams—he grew old and by some strange law, common in that strange country, he was—Joliffe, strong, hearty, as he had seen him. And there was talk of another wedding—a daughter this time. Gently as comes the remembrance of some evanescent perfume, there came to him memories of his own love-making; and he watched that old drudge, unoriginating nature, make this repetition without bitterness, for he felt that he, too, had had his day, and that his day had not been wasted. But now, most surprising of all, there came to the house a man of the same age, rich, famous, alone, who was also himself; and then, in strange dual existence, he compared each self with the other—the one in the

lush meadow where the grasses are, and the other, footsore upon some barren place where the treading crowd wear smoother the well-worn stones. And—the morning light was shining full in the room and in incomplete consciousness,

“Half in a dreme not fully well awake,”

gradually, it almost seemed, the figments of the night stole from him, and with sharp anguish he found himself—himself. Where were resolution, self-confidence, persistence, insistence; where the consciousness of strength, of eloquence of speech; where wisdom born of experience in affairs; where the arts of intercourse, the indescribable power of influencing men, the joy in large, comprehending thought, in forceful character? What were wealth, power, fame—what in comparison with wife and children and the accumulated happiness, sorrow-enriched, that is the abiding atmosphere, the vital air of family and home? What was it—the rapture in some crowning moment of great achievement—what was it, compared with the gifts ever recurring, the unchanging realities of man’s natural, wholesome, common life?

And he might have had all—all that he now

knew was so much — if he had but spoken. As he thought then, so he thought now, that the answer must have been “yes,” and the belief was agonizing to him. If he could only know that it could not have been; that no matter what he had said, the past could not have been different. To have held happiness within his grasp, and to have thrown it away! If he could only know that the meeting under the old apple-trees could have brought him nothing, then it seemed that what remained of life might be borne.

A stone wall bounded the orchard, an irregular mosaic of browns and blues and grays. Tall weeds grew plentifully beside it, grasses sprung from its crevices, moss covered its broken face, vines hung over it, and even here and there the branches rested on it. The wall could hardly be seen at all in summer, but it was autumn now and the rain had beaten down the stalks and scattered the leaves, and in places it was wholly uncovered. The Governor leaned upon its rounded top and looked across the ribbed fields. It seemed to him that he had been almost forgotten at the house in the excitement of preparation, and not wishing to

intrude upon the peculiarly personal interests of the time, he wandered forth alone. The morning was bright; sad, however, with that sadness felt in the brightest autumn day. Each tree, larger and more gnarled, perhaps, than when he had last seen it, was rich with memories; each boulder softened with an association. The bright, richly colored, fallen leaves seemed embroidered upon the dark tissue of the grass. The polished apples were bright in the sun. He strolled along a path—one of those paths turning here and there as the accordant fancies of the first passers made it, kept worn as others had followed with routine feet—and coming to the wall he rested his arms upon it and looked wearily beyond. As he stood there he felt that his life, too, had encountered a sudden barrier, over which he could only wistfully gaze.

He turned quickly as he heard a light foot-fall and the rustle of a dress.

It was the woman who was in his thoughts—the woman whom he had loved so long ago. Again they were together, in an autumn orchard, and after forty years.

“I missed you,” she said. “It is hardly hospitable that you should be left alone.”

"One is 'never alone," said the Governor, "where much has happened. I was never less alone. I am in the midst of many memories."

She said nothing. Were her thoughts, with his, in the tract known only to them?

In the strange sameness of the situation he felt almost as if he were again in his unworn youth. But he looked down upon his corded, blue-veined hand, rough-cast with years, hard of grain, it seemed, as the stone upon which it rested; he glanced at her, and saw the gray threads in the dark hair, saw the tracery of time upon the white forehead, and he was old again; the forty years had passed.

"I want to speak to you," he said. It seemed to him that the distant, indestructible past must permit to them both, frankness and absolute directness of speech, and he hastened to say what it had been in his heart to say since daybreak.

"Yes," she replied.

"Are you—are you wholly happy?" he asked, slowly.

"Wholly," she answered, looking up in some surprise from a branch of ruddy leaves which she had gathered.

"You remember the last time we walked together?" he asked, abruptly, hesitatingly, as he had spoken before.

"Yes," she answered, breaking some dry twigs from the branch. "That was a long time ago. We were very young then."

"Perhaps too young to know," said the Governor.

She did not speak.

He felt strangely; as if scarce naturally existent. The visual scene seemed trembling, dissolving, to be hardly as real as his vision of the night. The aspects of the place and of the day were the same; but was he looking at that day long gone, or at this through the glimmering, misty atmosphere of the past? He too was silent for a moment. He was thinking sadly that it was not a little strange that it was only now, and with weakening voice and lax lips, in passionless and measured accents, that he was to tell his love-story—a love-story that had waited nearly half a century for its dénouement. "We are so old," he continued at last, "that we can talk of what has been, almost as if we were already—somewhere else."

"Yes."

"I loved you once."



She did not speak.

“Then.”

“I thought so.”

“More than all else, except myself.”

“As you say,” she said, gently, and with a quick glance toward her home, “we can indeed talk as if we were—somewhere else. Why did you not tell me—then?”

“Because”—he spoke with the even, unbroken tone of quiet resignation—“because I was mistaken. Tell me—we may say anything now—if I had told you then, would your answer have been—yes?”

“Perhaps,” she replied, with the serene laugh of a woman so strong in a present and long-abiding love, that all else is as nothing. “We were very young then.”

She broke another twig from the branch, shook it, that any of the autumn-loosened leaves might fall, and glanced at her companion.

“I am afraid they will need me at the house,” she said. “Will you not come back with me?”

She turned to go, but the Governor, with his arms again on the wall, remained gazing over the barren fields; barren, but not in the sterility incapable of promise; barren, but still

covered with the stubble left by the gathered harvest.

The wedding was over. It was singularly like the one in the Governor's dream. The faces were a little clearer, the forms slightly more distinct; that was about all.

The church—it was a small brick place, with meagre stone corners and slender, small-paned windows, and a small stone steeple, through the openings of which the bell could be seen from the outside—the church, innocent of the adornments non-secular architecture now permits itself, and not unlike the rigid houses bordering the village street, could they be dressed in prim, Sunday array—the church, not unpicturesque even in its unpretentiousness, for time, dulling and staining the once bright-red brick into pleasing consonance of tone, had, it seemed, also softened and rounded its abrupt angles and sharp edges, an effect aided not a little by a Virginia creeper, now gorgeous in the livery of the passing year, that had clambered up the front, stretched across the slate roof and, in graceful tendrils, stealing through the openings in the belfry, played in the gentle air as the tentacles of some huge, resplend-

ent marine creature, hidden in some recess, might sway in a falling tide—the church was crowded, packed. All the village had turned out, and there were many guests from away. The church could not hold half that came, and many stood along the narrow, stone walk and on the leaf-strewn grass. But all saw the bride and were accordingly satisfied. The influential female relative had relented at the last moment, and, arriving on the morning train, now occupied the place of honor—a large front pew—with the Governor. As the wedding march sounded from the organ—the wedding march that has become almost as much a part of a wedding as the veil and ring, the march that few hear without anticipatory tremor or retrospective thrill—all seemed, for an instant, as all had seemed to the Governor, in the orchard, but a continuation of his dream. Then the influential female relative moved uneasily—she was truly not

“such stuff  
As dreams are made on,”

and he knew that he was awake.

The wedding was over. The bride had been driven to the house, and now, in its largest room,

she stood against a background of flowers and foliage, receiving the wedding guests. One by one they passed before her, many among them who had known her as a baby, as a child, as a young girl—saying their little speeches, some awkwardly enough perhaps, but not one without earnest desire that all happiness should be hers. Even the influential female relative, evidently moved by her youth and beauty, had stiffly embraced her. The room was so full that it was difficult to make way through it. The press about the bride was so great that only occasionally could anyone, not near, catch even a glimpse of her white dress. And then the crowd swayed and in strong current seemed to sweep the Governor from where he stood by the door, swiftly along, and he suddenly found himself before Susie. The stillness that at once settled on those about him half appalled him. Something was expected of him, he understood that, but in his trepidation he could hardly command himself enough to be able to realize what.

There was quick laughter, almost a burst of applause.

He did not know how he did it—he hardly knew at the time that he had done it—but he

had kissed the bride. He had done it and he was proud of it.

At the wedding supper the Governor made the speech when they drank Susie's health, and although no busy stenographers were there to catch the words as they fell, and send them swarming along the spider-web wires of this over-vexed earth—he never spoke better in his life.

Lysle paused for a moment on the stairs as Susie threw her bouquet among the crowd in the hall, and such uproar as always follows that event had not subsided when one of the ushers handed him a telegram which had just been received by a servant. He opened it, read it, and handed it to Susie.

It ran :

“We are happy to say that the arrangements for partnership of which we spoke to you can now be easily consummated. See us immediately on your return.

“RYDE & BROXTOWE.”

The Governor stood by the doorway, awkwardly holding an old satin slipper which someone had thrust into his hand—why, he did not

know. He looked up when Lysle began reading the despatch. He watched Susie take it; he watched her as she read, and saw the light of infinite happiness dawn in her face, saw the girl as she turned and cast her arms around her husband's neck; saw Lysle, for they must go, since time and tide and train wait for no one—not even a bride—toss the despatch with glad gesture to the doctor; and, as the carriage which bore so much away started, following the example of the others, he threw the old slipper after them with such surprisingly good aim that it fell directly on its roof.

The city again.

It is early evening, but the darkness is as intense as it will be at midnight. The rain falls in persistent, insistent drizzle. Each light is the nucleus of a long, luminous, cometic tail streaming over the swimming pavement. In the streets around the great railway-station the confusion of cabs and omnibuses is chaotic; on the sidewalks and in the waiting-rooms humanity is anarchic.

The Governor, jostled by the passengers eager in the first rush of their enfranchisement, slowly made his way down the long platform

at which the train had stopped. Usually he travelled in a special car, and attentive officials waited upon him at every step, but as he had gone upon this journey, so he returned—unheralded, unreceived, and with only Williams for attendant. He walked the whole length of the huge, resonant building, his eyes downcast or fixed upon the great clock at one end. Since he had seen it last the hour-hand had travelled around the face hardly half a dozen times, and yet it seemed to him that he had been away from the city for many days. As he approached the iron railing that crossed the broad, flagged walk, a young man stepped quickly through the opened gate and walked rapidly toward him.

“We telegraphed you, Governor,” he said hastily, “but couldn’t reach you before you started. We tried to catch you on the train, but I suppose it was no use.”

He was the Governor’s private secretary, the man who knew the most of his affairs, the man whom he trusted as much as he had ever trusted anyone.

“What’s the matter, Warner?” asked the Governor, detecting an unwonted excitement in the secretary’s usually measured and inexpressive voice.

"You haven't heard, sir! There hasn't been such a day on the Street for years. They are waiting at the house for you now."

"Who?"

"It's all out about the syndicate—came out this morning—how, no one knows. They all want time—they all want money—they all want everything."

The Governor coughed.

"The presidents of three railroads and two banks have been waiting for you ever since dark," the secretary suggested nervously. He had been brought up in a broker's office, and the great "King" of the "Street"—his

"round

And top of sovereignty"—

inspired him with a reverence that no crowned monarch could have excited in that strictly American heart.

"Yes, yes," said the Governor, abstractedly. "Tell Williams to see about the luggage and have the carriage brought up."

Warner hastened to obey, and the Governor remained standing in the draughty passageway. The arrivals by the train had dispersed and he was almost alone. Two men who had come in



hurriedly from the street stood beneath the flaring gaslight. One held a newspaper that he had just bought, and both were looking eagerly at it.

"It's the last edition," said one, "but there's nothing new."

"He's still away," said the other; "just like the sly old fox, to keep himself where no one can get at him. He's managed it well. It's the long-headedest scoop that's been made in my time."

"To think of a whole country waiting for him—for when the Street is excited the whole country is crazy from Boston to San Francisco. He has surpassed himself. He commands success; he compels fate. Happy—I'd give a year of my life for a moment of his to-night."

"How much do you suppose he'll make?" asked the other in awed tones.

"Millions! and he has millions now. What can he do with them?"

"Buy another railroad or another party—or his soul back from the devil."

And all this the Governor heard or half-heard.

The secretary returned, and shaking off the rain-drops, he pointed through the doorway to

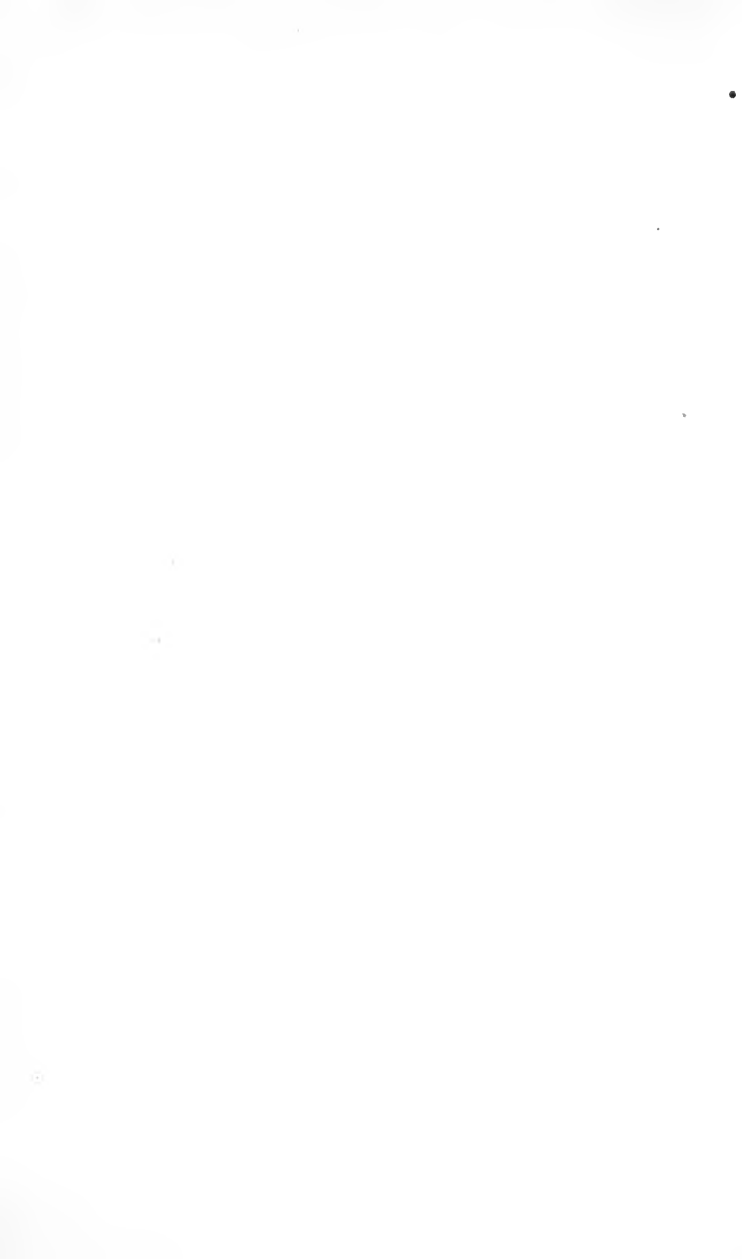
the carriage with its flashing lamps. A sharp gust of wind bustling along the street stirred the uneasy gaslights. The dull, ominous, threatening roar of the great city fell upon the Governor's ears. Was he thinking of the men anxiously waiting his coming, as he stood gazing into the darkness? was he thinking of the throbbing city where, during the day, his name had been uttered with wonder, with praises, with curses, by so many tongues: where it had appeared weighted with so much significance, upon so many printed pages? It was strange, but as he stood there—there, at what the world would call the most successful moment of his most successful life, he only thought of the amber, autumn light falling through twisted branches upon a young girl's face. It was a bright vision, and as it slowly faded, the night seemed even more dark, more bitter than before.

“Yes,” he thought, remembering vaguely what he had said to Joliffe. “Success is the only revenge that we can take upon the world, but——”

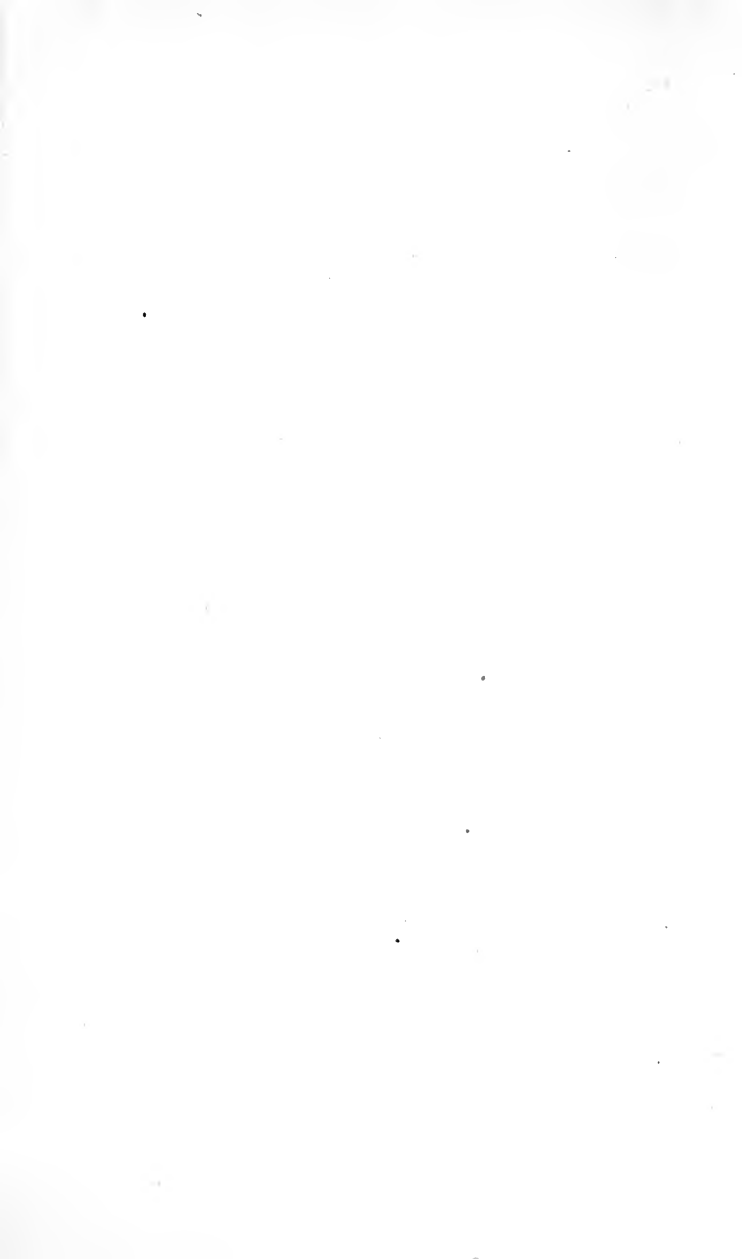
Splashing through the muddy pools, the horses made their way down the desolate and deserted avenue.

"Governor," said the secretary, as the carriage drew up before a great house with great darkened windows, "you have reached home."

But the Governor did not speak or stir.



# A DEEDLESS DRAMA



## A DEEDLESS DRAMA

“What’s done we partly may compute,  
But know not what’s resisted.”

BURNS.—“Address to the Unco Guid.”

### I.

“THE mail,” said Pruden, adjusting his gold eye-glasses more accurately upon his nose, “seems unusually heavy this morning.”

The cool morning light that fell through the panes of the high windows on the letter-strewn table, was broken and rendered tremulous by the sway of the gently stirring branches and the fall and flutter of the autumn foliage without. The smooth lawn, encircled by the firm driveway between the house and the heavy iron fence, appeared unusually green where the grass was visible through the massed stretches of russet leaves; but already the gardeners had begun work, and soon, the approach and the encom-

passed sward would be as neat as if it were close-girdled summer instead of careless autumn. The house that stood in the midst of the carefully tended grounds, belonged to the red-brick and yellow-sandstone period of American architecture, specimens of which crop up so plentifully throughout the country. It was very large, very regular, and very impersonal; it produced the impression of having cost a great deal of money, and was honored accordingly.

"There have been more letters every day," said the person to whom Pruden spoke, a tall woman, who turned from the window with something of the alertness of youth and a little of the apathy of age in the movement, but still with a peculiar self-contained poise evidently characteristic of the individual. "As to-morrow is the day before election, I suppose you will be inundated."

Then, she added, after a short pause, a little listlessly, and as if by some effort of memory she brought herself to ask the question :

"What are they all about?"

"About," answered Pruden, with his habitual laugh, "about everything and about nothing. They're all alike in this, however, they all ask something. I think that no one can really un-



derstand the multifarious demands of humanity unless he is a millionaire or has been a candidate for public office. Here," he continued, picking up a sheet of paper, "is a Chatterton who has written a poem in my honor, of sixty-three stanzas, in which I am compared to Columbus;" and he read:

"Like him who first the country saw,  
And gave the world a continent,  
So you will bring reform and law,  
And give us honest government.'

However, he only wants a subscription to help him to bring out his book. This," he went on, taking up another letter, "is to inform me that a gentleman who has been blessed with twins has done me the honor to christen one after me, and wishes to know my wife's name so that he may name the other after her. He does not say expressly what he wants, but darkly hints at the fitness of his wife's grandmother for the position of a scrub-woman in the City Buildings. Here is one from a person who says that he has noticed with regret that I am growing slightly bald, and that he ventures to send me a wash that he assures me will bring back the hair in its accustomed luxuriance and restore it

to its pristine color. All that he desires is a certificate attesting the beneficial effects I have experienced from its use. Here are others," and he gathered up a handful, "of the regulation pattern, promising support and influence, all for more or less clearly expressed considerations. And here is one from the editor of *The Multiple*, asking for an interview upon a most important matter."

"What is it?" she demanded, with that sudden quickening of utterance and vigor of accent that denote increased attention, if not newly awakened interest.

"Why—you see—my dear," began Pruden, coughing slightly and glancing over his glasses, placed far down on his nose, "I suppose—I do not say certainly—but I suppose it is about the same old thing."

His wife rose from the chair in which she had just seated herself, beside the gently flickering fire, and throwing aside the newspaper at which she had carelessly glanced, came and stood before him on the other side of the table. Gray hairs were discoverable in the crisp waves of her black locks—her maid had at one time attempted their extraction, but had been somewhat peremptorily ordered to

desist—and a few small wrinkles might have been discerned about her eyes and the corners of her mouth when it was motionless, the strange fixity of expression peculiar to her making Time's delicate *intaglio* the more evident. But she was still a strangely beautiful woman. Although her complexion had not the freshness of extreme youth, there was in her face a ruddy color—the color of vigorous, untroubled health—that was almost a compensating quality; and the brilliancy of her eyes, which had not known, and evidently never would know, diminution or change until the last, gave her face a youthful vividness, and often a quick animation, in spite of its habitual coldness of expression. As she stood with the light full upon her, as strongly erect as she had stood, when Ethel Burdyne, at her first ball, it hardly could seem possible that she had been the wife of Robert Pruden for fourteen years—marrying him at twenty-three with the full consent of her family and the unqualified approbation of the town.

“Will that hateful old story never die?” she exclaimed, impatiently. “Of course you will refuse to see him?”

“I cannot very well do that,” answered Pru-

den ; "but I can refuse to accede to what he probably wishes."

"You can ; you must," she answered. "Robert, you would not do such a thing—you know that you would not. There are too many reasons why Mr. Harding, enemy though he may have been for a very long time, and political opponent though he now is, should be well treated by you."

"But is this really just?" remonstrated Pruden, a little petulantly. "A man should suffer for his misdeeds ; and if another profits by his suffering, it is but a part of his penalty."

"Are you sure that he was guilty?" she asked, with the manner of one who puts an often-repeated question.

"I could not prove it, you know," he replied ; "but every indication at the time pointed to his guilt, and popular opinion universally condemned him."

"But nothing was ever established," she said, wearily, and with the slow, lagging words of ineffectual repetition. "Would you profit by a doubt?"

She had urged the same point so often, repeated the same arguments so frequently during the past few weeks.

"You know that I have refused to have the story used. But I hesitate—I doubt sometimes——"

"Robert," she interrupted, and there was something in her voice that startled even herself, "you are certain of your success; you can afford to be magnanimous. The day after to-morrow will be election-day; you are sure to be elected. Do not let the value of your victory be lessened in your own estimation by the knowledge that an unjust, and certainly an ungenerous action may have contributed toward it; do not make another's defeat the more bitter by the fact that perhaps it has been, in a manner, brought about by the imputation of a fault of which perhaps he was never guilty."

"You always plead for him," said Pruden, angrily, as one thin wrinkle struck across his smooth, white forehead, and his full, pink lips gathered in quick contraction.

"You know I do not," she answered, with the remnant of an almost outworn indignation in her tone. "Why do you always accuse me of it? Cannot you believe me? I plead for you—for you, yourself. You have so far resisted a temptation; do not yield to it now."

"If it had been any other man, would you

have been so eager—so earnest?” continued Pruden, looking at her and then glancing away. His eyes were small, and the steadiness of his gaze had only given them an expression of anxious and suspicious incredulity.

“You have asked me that before—you have asked it of me a dozen times in the last month. Why have you done so?”

“Because,” he replied, in a voice that would have been gibing had it not been apologetic, and with an expression that might have been sneering had it not been one of fearfulness, “because a woman always has a weakness for the man who once loved her—because——”

“Robert,” she said, in the measured tone of conscious repression, “you are a good man and I am a good woman. We can afford to speak the truth. Fifteen years ago James Harding sought to marry me. I married you. Cannot you forget that he was your rival? Does the fact that he is your opponent now so embitter you that you misjudge him—and me? In the last few days, in look and tone, in words even, you have implied that I have been watchful of his interests, more watchful than I should have been of the interests of another. Because I have asked you not to revive this

old scandal, you have insinuated more or less clearly that I have not been true to you. Is this fair, is it fitting, is it even dignified? Have not all the years that we have lived together led to something better—more secure? Cannot you trust me? Because you have hated him, and he, as I suppose, has hated you, must you, with wilful perversity, misrepresent circumstances and lives?"

"But"—began Pruden, suspicious as are those who are uncertain of themselves—whose self-doubt begets doubt of others. He paused, beat his fingers softly on the table, and then went on with greater boldness than he had hitherto shown: "But he loved you once."

"I have understood the meaning underlying your words," she said. "What I feared has come. When you were nominated, and I learned that you were to be the opponent of Mr. Harding, I did what I could to dissuade you from running against him."

"If my interests—" commenced Pruden, with the insistence of weakness.

"You know that I have always made your interests mine," she interrupted, in her sudden scorn letting her clear voice ring out with something of its natural vigor. "After fourteen

years, can you not trust me—once? I tried to induce you to refuse the honor, as you called it. I could give no reason; I knew none. I only vaguely feared trouble, and trouble has come. Suspicion may exist, doubt may even be ever present, but when neither has found utterance people may live with dignity and self-respect, if not with tranquillity and happiness. But let what each knows be once acknowledged by both, and all peace, all restraint is at an end. What has been said once will be said again; both will live but in apprehension of its repetition. You taunt me with the fact that James Harding loved me; you will next accuse me of having loved him. No two, quarrelling in a hovel, could really be more rudely explicit than we should become; and though our language might be better, our lives would really be as squalid.”

She paused and glanced down at her husband as he sat at the table.

James Harding and Robert Pruden had journeyed through life with orbits constantly crossing and recrossing in one of those compulsory relations which sometimes seem inexorably imposed upon human beings, and which



they no more can change, however discontented they may be, than a dissatisfied planet can change its system. Of nearly the same age, and born to nearly equal positions and fortunes, their lives had been so much alike in circumstance as to invite comparison, and their names had always been inseparably bracketed in the public mind.

It is not only between the patrician families of a picturesque Verona, that personal feuds arise that involve families and communities as well as individuals. Race hatreds that have existed for a greater or less time are to be found in all our cities, and, though they may not be carried on as frankly and as bloodily as in other places and other times, they are really hardly less bitter. They may not be fought out with the sword thrust and parry in the moonlit streets; but they certainly are very vigorously prosecuted in the drawing-room and across the dinner-table with the tongue's give and take.

Once, "before the war," the Hardings and the Prudens had been friends; and in childhood and boyhood Pruden and Harding had lived in the compulsory intimacy of a limited society. Whether they had been really friends

they could themselves hardly have said ; often those who are by circumstances much thrown together acquire a habit of intercourse that very effectively replaces actual congeniality, and enables them to go on without the necessity of questioning the exact nature of their relations. Although they were social equals, the quality, so to speak, of their families' positions was very different. Pruden, the elder, had always affected a certain simplicity of life and austerity of manner that marked him as a zealous upholder of most things called conservative, and had already, in that remote time, won for him the appellation of "old-fashioned." Harding, on the other hand, had, as far as was possible in that unvitalized period, led the lighter life of the larger world ; had rather despised Pruden's "puritanical" prejudices ; had married a Harpending ; had been wise in wine and "horse," and, before anyone else in the city, had put his coachman in livery. Young Pruden was an exemplary student, rejoicing in an examination and scenting a prize from afar, a "dig" and a "grind ;" but young Harding found the *pons asinorum* a "Bridge of Sighs," and with difficulty had advanced with Xenophon even the regulation number of parasangs

a day. But he could ride more lightly, run more swiftly, and swim more strongly than any of his companions. When Pruden spoke of Harding's son it was as "that young savage;" while Harding designated his friend's offspring as "the bookworm."

At Harvard, Harding was the first marshal of his class; Pruden delivered the oration. Both men had inherited fortunes and were really independent; but society at that time demanded at least an ostensible occupation, and after graduation, on their return home to assume the responsibilities of their positions, both became active partners in a firm of long standing, whose founders were all dead except one—Christopher Burdyne—the father of Ethel Burdyne.

The men fell apart. Harding made idleness, which had hitherto been regarded with absolute disfavor in the place, possible, if not distinguished, and really revolutionized much of the life of the town, making its society, for better or worse, a more accurate counterpart of the life of larger and older places. Mankind always demands a leader, the living exponent of an idea, some one to whom it is possible to point and say: "Behold, this is an example of

all that is admirable." Pruden—without effort, and unavoidably, became the representative of those who felt themselves aggrieved by young Harding's mode of life—found himself advanced as the exemplar of the principles of the more staid members of the community. He was scrupulous in his attention to "business;" systematic in his charities; accurate in every conventional observance. Respectable heads of families held him up as a pattern of all that was desirable for their sons, and worthy matrons welcomed him effusively as a partner for their daughters. But there was many a radiant young sovereign of the ball-room, reigning by true right divine, who smiled on young Harding, and hardly a spirited youngster in town who was not his friend.

The almost imperceptible but inevitable disintegration of time took place; then the most sudden and absolute fracture possible occurred—that cleavage that can separate the closest-bound lives, the firmest friendships. Both men fell in love, and the woman both loved was the same. Had it been another than she, the dormant, unrecognized antipathy that had so long existed might not have so suddenly developed into open, active animosity; but

both loved Ethel Burdyne, and such result was inevitable. She was not a woman to be loved half-heartedly. He who had once felt the power of her dark glance was as little able to free himself from its subversive influence as it was once supposed the tarantula-bitten wretch was to escape from the effect of the venomous sting. And it was a pretty dance she led her victims—a wild tarantism, from which they neither sought nor desired freedom. Her careless, girlish arrogance drove Harding, with his more excitable nature, to desperation; with Pruden her calm capriciousness was only a needed excitant, animating but not overmastering him. His love, however, played strange havoc with his well-formulated beliefs and well-grounded prejudices; it came across his life like a tumultuous gust of wind sweeping across his well-kept desk, mixing and confusing all his carefully arranged ideas, as the invading puff might his perfectly ordered papers.

Harding was in difficulty, and his present infatuation seemed only to make him the more reckless. There was talk of dissipated faculties and wasted opportunities; there were whispers of large losses at play. That he was embarrassed for want of money was well known; al-

though he had but a short time before possessed ample means, it was understood that he was borrowing largely.

Sometimes it is a great thing, sometimes a very small one, but sooner or later, although often unaccountably delayed, something happens that is the culmination of a cumulative series of events, and that characterizes all that has gone before and all that comes afterward. One morning about "the streets," and one afternoon at the club, there was a strange rumor. Burdyne, Harding & Pruden, it was said, had been robbed of a large sum of money. Where the story started no one could tell; but, with all the strange amplitude of detail of undefined report, it was in men's mouths, and thenceforth, was, within even the lives of generations, never to be driven from men's minds. That a large sum had been stolen—from fifty to a hundred thousand dollars—no one doubted. The night before it had been in the firm's vault; in the morning it was gone. The lock was intact; the great door was untouched. But the drawer in which the money had been was empty. Only the members of the firm possessed a key that would open the complicated lock, or knew the "sesame" of the "combination;" and yet the

money was undoubtedly missing. When old Mr. Burdyne was incidentally questioned, he only shook his head and admitted that the firm had sustained a considerable loss ; interviewed by the representative of an enterprising newspaper, he confessed that the matter was under investigation. Neither Harding nor Pruden would say anything, and all that was ever publicly known was what had come into common knowledge at the very first. Finally, with decreasing speculation, the affair ceased actively to occupy the general attention ; but from that morning Harding was a marked man—by the irresponsible tribunals of the counting-room and smoking-room he had been as irrevocably condemned as was ever a criminal by judge or jury. But little was ever said that he could hear ; it is doubtful if he could have described any change in the manner of those whom he daily met ; but from that moment he was in a measure an outcast—a man out of full and perfect communion with his kind. He was a man with a story. Such men are to be found everywhere, often apparently enjoying the esteem of many and the confidence of all ; but let even a stranger look a little more closely or observe a little longer existing conditions, and he will de-

tect, as to such a one, marked differences and reservations. He is the man with a history ; at his heels drags an invisible but impeding ball and chain, and on his wrists are undiscernible manacles ; unconsciously his eyes fall in anticipation of the condemnatory glance ; unavoidably his tongue hesitates as if fearful of rebuff, for, even if innocent, he cannot preserve the frankness and freedom of unsuspected integrity. What is said of him may not be true, and he may know it ; but it has been said, and no words graven on monumental brass or cut in memorial marble are more enduring than those recorded in grave or light character on the public mind—no conviction so absolute and without appeal as that pronounced by the public voice.

Harding was at first indifferent, then actively and proudly rebellious—ready to suspect affront and resentful of any imagined insult—then dully resigned. What could he do against the many ? He might convince one in a thousand, but, with their wide dissemination, could he ever hope to destroy the wide-spread plaguegerms of scandal, the microbes of defamation ?

Men forgot in the press of newer matters to discuss the ugly story ; but there was not one whose first thought at sight of Harding was not



of the robbery. After a while the subject was absolutely stricken out of the list of the day's topics ; then, it was revived for a time, when it was known that the firm of Burdyne, Harding & Pruden had been dissolved ; and again was less actively taken up when it was learned that Pruden was to marry Ethel Burdyne. A decade passed ; the place changed and the people, but the story was not quite forgotten. It lingered in the memory of many of the townspeople, gaining something in romantic interest by the flight of time, in much the same manner as the town-pump that had once stood in the main street, a plain and unpretentious affair, had in unrecognized association acquired a certain picturesqueness. Harding's story became one of the legends of the place. As another generation began its life, it was whispered in attentive ears, and heard almost as eagerly as on the morning when it was new. Harding himself had changed. Levity and carelessness were gone ; an unvarying and disdainful reserve had taken the place of his former blithe *bonhomie*. His manner of life changed. He who had been the most flippant idler became an unquestionable hard worker—absorbed in affairs and apparently without other thought than gain. He

greatly prospered, gathering to himself a huge fortune ; and men looked almost with awe upon the man whom no turn of a market ever found unprepared. Harding's party, in the minority in the place, sought a candidate. His popularity was an uncertain quantity, but his riches were indubitable. If the spoils of victory were not to be won, the pickings of the "campaign" were not to be despised. He was nominated, and, to the surprise of everyone, he accepted the nomination.

There was a moment's silence in the room where Pruden sat before his wife ; then he laughed irritably. He laughed very frequently ; sometimes excitedly, often embarrassedly, occasionally exultingly. It was a peculiarity to which Ethel had never become resigned ; and she dreaded inexpressibly that inopportune, boisterous laughter, boyish without boyishness, breaking out in some loud guffaw at some silly joke, covering some new *gaucherie*, rejoicing over some small point gained. Often some little habit, at first almost unnoticed, will, by its persistence, thrust itself upon the attention of one who is obliged to live with its possessor, and, in the course of time, become a terrible

infliction. It may be only a very small thing, but sometimes, where a previous and prevailing fondness does not exist, it starts, fosters, and perfects a hatred such as the discovery of crime could not have occasioned. With morbid expectancy the sufferer watches for the recurrence of the distasteful thing, unable to drive away the consciousness of its coming, and proximity becomes a prolonged dread. Such a thing in a measure was Pruden's laugh to Ethel; it had from the first jarred upon her; in time it became almost physically disagreeable. Now it seemed almost unendurable.

"I speak seriously," she said, "and for the future. Robert," she went on, picking up a paper-knife, an imitation dagger whose bright blade gleamed viciously in her firm grasp, "you have been tempted, and you have resisted nobly. How great the inducement must have been to take advantage of what chance offered to you I can understand, all must understand. You had only to consent to the use of the story as a campaign measure to injure James Harding and advance your own interests. With all the pressure brought to bear upon you—and I know what it has been—you have refused to do so. I honor you for it; all must honor you for

it. I said a moment ago that you were a good man. You have always been very good to me——”

She paused, and the little knife dropped from her hand with a sharp, metallic ring upon the table.

“And yet,” he said, slowly, “you never have loved me.”

She looked down at Pruden, who, with his diffident indirectness of glance, seemed rather one accused than one accusing.

“I knew it always,” he added, almost plaintively, “but I have always hoped that I might overcome your—your indifference. I have done what I could, and now it seems that your—aversion——”

“No, no,” she interrupted.

He hesitated as if he expected her to speak further, but she said nothing.

“At all events, your affection is as far beyond my attainment as ever,” he went on. “James Harding——”

“Must his name be used—must we speak of him?”

“Yes,” answered Pruden, with that apathy with which much that is most vital can be said when it has been long thought. “You would

have married James Harding if you had not thought him unworthy—had not known him to be a——”

“No,” she interrupted, almost fiercely, “I never thought it, and—you shall not say it.”

“You defend him now, even when you know him indefensible,” he said, with jealous readiness.

“I defend him as I would any stranger I believed unjustly accused.”

“If you believed him innocent why did you not marry him?” he demanded, forgetful of all self-control and with that abject curiosity of the jealous, who stop at no self-abasement to learn what they desire to know.

She smiled a little sadly.

“I married you,” she answered. “Have you any reason to suppose that it was not because I wished to do so?”

“No,” he replied, sullenly.

“And I have loved you, Robert.”

“Love!” he said, almost as if in soliloquy. “Yes,” and he smiled with a certain patient resignation that was not without dignity, “you have loved me. I know. But how have you loved me? The best love is given in spite of all reason; it was reason alone that accredited

me to you, otherwise you would not have married me. You never have—you never could have loved me, with that other love. The thought that I could not win what was given to a worthless idler was exasperation to me. I exulted in his downfall. I——”

“You do not know he did it,” she said, with the same tone of mechanical reiteration with which she had urged the possibility of Harding’s innocence before—as if she were fulfilling some duty so habitual as to be almost unconsciously performed.

“We dissolved the firm upon that supposition,” he said, “choosing to lose the money rather than prosecute an associate. I firmly believe that he did the thing, and with the dislike—hatred—that I have always had for him, it has been very difficult for me to refrain from doing something that many would think only natural. I have had nothing to lose and much to gain.”

“If you had done otherwise you would have lost in the consideration of all thoughtful people. You could prove nothing—you could only vilify; and in refraining from doing that, you have the consciousness that you have been an honorable gentleman.”

"I have not done it ; I have been weak, at times, but I have not done it. This temptation has been nearly the measure of my power. I cannot imagine an added element that would make it greater ; but were it possible that it should be greater—I hope you will understand what I have done—I could not have resisted it.

He paused, for he had spoken with an intensity unusual with him, and he appeared almost physically exhausted.

"The better part of our lives is past," he resumed, in a moment. "If we have not been joyously successful, we have at least been decently peaceful. I do not mean to say any distressing or disturbing things now. We have gone too far for that. I have tried to do the best for you, in my way—another way might have made you happier, perhaps, but I was unequal to it or did not know. That I could not do better, I am sorry. I do not blame you for anything. I understand now how hard you have tried too—in your way."

"We have not done so very badly, Robert," she answered, kindly. "I think we are not exactly people for tremor and transport ; and if we have missed a little of the intoxication,

we are not now of an age when we should regret it. Believe me," and she spoke with even regretful tenderness, "no one could have been kinder, more considerate, more forbearing."

She held out her hand to him across the table, and, taking it clumsily in both his own, he shyly kissed it.



## II.

As Harding closed and locked the door of his private office, shutting out the discordant hum of voices that filled the crowded rooms beyond, the stamp of hurried feet, the grating noise of chairs shoved abruptly back or drawn hastily forward over the wooden floor—as he removed the newspaper from the pocket in which he had so hastily thrust it when it had first been brought to him, he felt that relief that is often given by the consciousness that the period of suspense is finally ended, that the long-dreaded blow has at last fallen, that the worst that can be has come. He stepped to the window and unfolded the scant leaves. *The Multiple* was only a penny paper, and hardly indicative in its appearance of its large circulation and wide influence. He glanced along the columns of the first page, and instantly the article he sought caught his eyes. Double-leaded and with heavy black heading, the lines that he had dreaded every

morning and evening to find in some hostile sheet stood conspicuous. He bit his lower lip, as was a habit with him, and his fingers tightened slightly upon the common hard paper upon which *The Multiple* was printed, causing the coarse fabric to crackle with an almost malicious sharpness. Still he did not at once read the words staring him in the face; he only looked vacantly out and through the dust-dimmed pane. He was anxious, feverishly, fearfully anxious, to gather the full import of the dreaded sentences, but still he weakly postponed the moment of full realization. If comprehension could only be reached without reading the detestable phrases, word after word!

The window looked upon the courtyard of the great building—his own—the “Harding Building,” in which were his offices, as were also the offices, story on story, of nearly every important professional man or considerable corporation in town—a building from which he drew the revenue of a German principality, and that was a boast for the inhabitants and a jest for the dwellers in rival and envious cities. It was a little later than noon. The telegraph and telephone wires, extending from

roof to roof in bewildering confusion, cast thick shadows on the walls and pavement, so thick and strong that, looking only at them, you might have imagined that innumerable heavy cables had been stretched across the space for the aërial performance of a troop of tight-rope dancers. Dully the sound of the jarring wheels rose from the street, vaguely the cries of the small traffickers of the sidewalk rose to the secluded room. The business-day was at its meridian; the business-world supremely active—that world in which latterly he had solely lived, and which he had come to know so well. He was upon his own ground, in secure possession upon an often contested field; with his massed millions, what could harm him? But even as he sought to assure himself he almost trembled. He understood the cowardly cruelty of the many, and knew that a bold assault like the present would be followed by almost endless guerilla warfare.

He grasped the paper still tighter, and looked again at the article.

“He has done it at last,” Harding muttered. “I knew he would. The chance was too good for him to lose. The sanctimonious hypocrite!”

He had only half an hour before learned that

the attack upon him had appeared. No one had dared to tell him of this, and it was only when Plestero, entering the committee-rooms, had, with the innocence of fatuity and the hardihood of folly, made joking allusion to it, that Harding learned that what he dreaded most in the world had happened. There, at last, it all was, in black and white—the old, old miserable story, with dates, names, and even the amount confidently given. He read, almost in one comprehensive glance, then with a quick, indignant exclamation, that ended in an oath, he tore the paper across and cast it on the floor. He was so helpless, and he knew it; so friendless, and he fully realized it. Before this accusation, that had been gathering force for fifteen years, he must remain silent. He felt “cornered”—at bay—and something of the anguish and brute anger of a trapped and desperate animal rose in his heart, arousing every instinct of self-preservation and every impulse of revenge.

He turned and walked across the floor. There are times in the lives of the best of us when, shirk the fact as we may, if the weapon of destruction were in our grasp we would not put it away. Well it is indeed that means are

not always responsive to desire. To Harding, as he paced the room, nature seemed a hostile, threatening thing, and mankind a personal enemy; in his fierce revolt no act of retaliation would have appeared a crime.

There was a knock at the door.

With election on the day after the morrow, all had business with him, and none could be refused.

"Come in," he cried, and then he turned the key and instinctively stood with his back to the light.

"A young man who wishes to see you, sir," said the clerk, as he entered. "I've tried to get rid of him, but he won't go. He says he has something most important to say."

"Well," responded Harding, sharply.

The man closed the door softly, but in a moment it was again opened and another figure stood upon the threshold. With one hand upon the handle the new-comer steadied himself and looked vaguely around.

"Good-morning, Mr. Harding," he said, rather huskily, but still intelligibly enough.

It sometimes happens that we meet people who are so perfectly "dressed" for their too

evident character that they almost impress us with a sense of unreality. It almost seems that they are "doing it on purpose," so exactly are their habiliments such as we should expect to find upon a clever actor representing what they clearly are. The young man who stood in the doorway was so consummate a personification of the species "tough," that he was almost ludicrous in his exactitude. He seemed, as it were, some grotesque caricature of himself.

"Mornin', Mr. Harding!" he went on.

"Good-morning."

"I hate to take your time," he continued, "as the man said when he annexed the other fellow's watch. But I believe in going to headquarters straight, and so I came to you."

Harding did not speak.

"I suppose you don't know who I am." He took one step into the room, with his hand still on the door-handle.

"Perhaps I do," answered Harding. "I am very much occupied; if you have anything to say I hope you will say it."

"But if I told you I was the son of Colby, the book-keeper of the firm of Burdyne, Harding & Pruden, perhaps you might think there was some reason for talking to me."

Colby glanced over his shoulder at the clerk who stood behind him.

"A confidential communication," he said.

Harding nodded, and the clerk disappeared.

Moved as he was by what he had just read, the immediate mention of the name of the old firm affected him strangely ; it seemed, coming as it did in such close connection, some mocking play of fate, and it was with an unusual sense of excitement that he spoke.

"I remember your father very well, Mr. Colby," he said. "He was a very worthy man, and had the respect of all who knew him. He died, I think, about five years ago—and I am unable to see——"

"Don't accelerate the conversation, Mr. Harding, or, in other words, don't go too fast. I've heard it said that dead men tell no tales. Well, it ain't true. They talk sometimes, and then they talk loud."

He winked at Harding, at the same time slightly elevating his chin.

"It's true he died five years ago," continued Colby, "but, just before, he freed his mind of something that I thought perhaps you'd like to hear."

"Yes," said Harding, with almost tremulous

anxiety. Excited as he was, there seemed something terrifying in the appositeness of the incident.

"Mr. Harding," said Colby, carefully closing the door, "you never stole that money."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you never stole that money—because another man did it."

Harding sank into the chair beside which he stood.

"And I've got the way to prove it."

Harding did not speak. Not for an instant did he doubt the truth of what was said. After his involuntary acquiescence in the probability of what had seemed impossible, he was prepared to believe anything.

Colby advanced a step or two further into the room.

"I have my father's statement—all regular and sworn to—proving who stole that money, and it wasn't you, Mr. Harding."

Still Harding said nothing.

"When I saw that thing in the paper this morning, I thought I'd better act. The old gentleman was always unwilling that the truth should come out, for some reason; but it lay on his mind, and just before he died he wrote



it down. I'm hard up, or, rather, hard down, for I've touched my lowest level—my last cent. I've got to raise the wind, I wouldn't mind if it blew a Western cyclone, and I thought that, all things considered, you might be willing to help turn on the breeze."

"What do you want?"

"I'm not particular. I only want money. Give me enough, and I'll give you the means of fixing old Pruden so that he'll not squeal again."

"Pruden?"

"It was he stole that money—see here." And drawing a paper from his pocket he began to read from it: "'Being upon the point of quitting this world, and wishing to have nothing upon my soul, I make the following statement, earnestly hoping that it may never be used to the detriment of any of the persons concerned, all of whom have treated me with unvarying kindness, and none of whom I would desire to injure. Still, as the truth is always desirable and certain in the end to be beneficial, I now say what I do. On the night of June 15, 18—, the night of the robbery of the firm of Burdyne, Harding & Pruden, I had returned to the office to complete some work that

was pressing upon me. I was the confidential clerk of the firm, and had a key that admitted me to the offices at any time. It was late at night when I finished what I had to do, and I had turned out the gas preparatory to leaving, when I heard a slight noise in the next room. I was an old man even at that time, and I was timorous. I thought that it would be best for me to conceal myself, and then if anything happened I could later give the alarm. I saw a figure enter the room in which I was. I saw the person, whose features the darkness did not then permit me to distinguish, grope his way to the safe and open it. For some time he rummaged among the papers, but evidently not being able to find what he sought, he drew what I supposed to be a match-case from his pocket and lit a match. I saw Robert Pruden standing before that safe as clearly as I ever saw any man in my life; I saw him extract a small bundle from it; saw him close the door, blow out the match, make his way back across the room. I——’ ”

“Your father wrote that?” said Harding.

“Yes.”

“Let me see it.”

“You can look at it,” said Colby, holding up

the paper so that Harding could see the writing across the large office-table.

There could be no doubt about its authenticity; there, in old Colby's clerkly characters, in that handwriting he knew almost as well as his own, were the words that had just been read to him.

"The thing's worth a gold mine to you," said Colby.

"It is evidently only a question with you of how much money you can get?" said Harding, with interrogatory inflection.

"Oh, how much ain't for me to say. I'm not here to bargain. There ain't no market-price on such things, and the amount is bound to vary according to the purchaser. I've got something here that's to be got nowhere else—I'm the only shop dealing in just this kind of goods; it's a fancy article, and I naturally look to get money for it. Now, just you say what you think it's worth to you, and then——"

Harding did not answer, but, stepping to a desk, he hurriedly filled out a check.

"There," he said, turning and holding out the narrow slip of paper. "Not a cent more."

A quick gleam of satisfied covetousness shone for an instant in young Colby's dull eyes.

"It don't take gentlemen long to understand one another, does it?" he said, with the first respectful intonation his voice had held.

"I think that is all."

"I think," answered Colby, with a nervous laugh, "that we'll call this little matter ended and part friends."

Few things in life had power to awe him, but the ability of a man to draw his check for such an amount abashed and, without question, filled him with an admiration and reverence that hardly any other manifestation of human power could have caused.

"Go, then, and——" began Harding, with a gesture of dismissal—"take that side-door; you need not go back through the offices."

With an utter absence of the jaunty confidence with which he had entered, Colby opened the door to which Harding pointed.

"I'd thank you," he faltered, "only I know that obligations are mutual."

And he was gone.

It had not been difficult for Harding to keep himself from any undue exhibition of his perturbation during the interview, so surprisingly brief for one of such moment; his very excitement, in raising him, as it were, to a higher

level of emotion, had made all his words and actions accordant and consistent, and precluded that abruptness that is generally the first indication of unusual agitation. It happens but rarely that a man experiences so absolute a change of feeling in so short a time. But ten minutes before he had felt the outrage of unjust accusation—an accusation that, after having been almost mute for years, had at last, when patience was exhausted and power of endurance almost lost, found condensed and effective utterance at a time when of all others it was most calculated to do him serious harm ; ten minutes before he had felt the blind wrath of his utter powerlessness—that wrath that, springing from a sense of injustice done, makes the human being eager to shake the support of all things as the strong man did the pillars at Dagon's feast, and involve himself and everyone in general destruction. It had all passed so rapidly that as yet he hardly realized what had really happened. Sitting at the desk on which he had written the check, he let his head fall upon his folded arms, unconscious of the darkness of closed eyelids and the prisoning grasp of his hands about his forehead, for suddenly life seemed newly illumed, and his

spirit strangely free. Now, for the first time in fifteen years, he experienced something of the joy of unrestrained existence ; now seemed able to meet the curious and accusative glances, the expressive silences ; now he had a response for every unasked question ; and now he felt in anticipation the thrilling exultation of revenge. A man does not live for fifteen years at conscious variance with his kind without some hardening of the heart, some embitterment of the spirit, and Harding experienced now almost the joy of a conqueror overcoming a hostile race. He had been a successful man, but all that he had won had been difficult of acquirement ; and he felt a malevolent resentment against mankind who had made his life so difficult, such as the miner may feel against the obdurate soil, or a fisherman against the cruel and baffling sea. Now all was changed. As if at some incantation, in response to his desire for vengeance, this ugly distortion of humanity had appeared and given into his hands power as absolute as any invoked and willing demon could confer. Now he held the means of reinstating himself, of ruining another, and that other the one who had sought to injure him. He thought, as he almost lay upon the

desk, that he could not act too quickly ; and yet he did not stir.

Again there was a knock at the door connecting with the other offices.

He did not even raise his head.

The knock was repeated.

At his sudden command, the clerk who had before appeared again entered.

"There is a lady in the outer room who wishes to speak to you, sir," said the man. "She will not tell her business."

"Say I'm engaged," answered Harding, peremptorily.

The man hesitated. Something had evidently impressed either his judgment or his imagination, and he was visibly unwilling to depart with such message of dismissal. He stood mutely advocating the desired interview in the silently expressive way known to all employees. Unsettled, unnerved, unmanned as Harding was, even such influence possessed strange coercive power.

"Let her come in," he said, impatiently. "Bring her through the hall by the side-door."

The clerk disappeared, and almost on the instant Harding had forgotten the interruption.

His thoughts were busy again with the great fact of his emancipation, and fancy was active fashioning his probable future. In quick visionary sequence he saw the scenes of the new life that was before him—a life of lessened repression and, in his freedom of action, of larger attainment. With this stigma removed, what might not be possible for him—with this election gained, what high offices might not be open to him!

After a knock of warning—a moment's pause—the door through which Colby had made his exit opened, and a woman was ushered in by the clerk. Her veil was so thick that even in a stronger light it would have been impossible to distinguish her features, and her drapery was so voluminous as utterly to conceal her figure.

"I should like, Mr. Harding," she said, with her voice only raised to half its usual power, "to speak with you alone."

Harding's frame seemed suddenly to stiffen, as the body of an animal stiffens after the death-blow, and then as quickly relaxed.

"You may go," he said to the man.

Hardly had the door closed when he was on his feet.

"Ethel!" he cried.



"Yes," she answered, quietly and sadly, as she unwound the veil that in its density seemed almost a scarf. "Ethel Burdyne, when we last spoke to each other alone, fifteen years ago—but not Ethel Burdyne now."

Harding stood looking curiously at her.

"It is a long time," she went on. "Why have you not, in all that time, sought once to talk with me?"

"What had I to say? Long ago I said all that a man can say to a woman—I said I loved you. After that there is nothing more to say. I have never had anything to add, nothing to take away. I have lived, silent and as best I might, the life that was left to me."

"I know," she said. "It is strange; we have lived in the same place; at first we met in the same drawing-rooms, sometimes at the same dinner-tables, with only a formal word; latterly we have driven past each other in the street or park with a hardly more formal bow. We have been as much separated as if we were in different zones. Has it been necessary? Because——"

"Because you would not marry me—no; because you did me a great wrong—yes. Why do you speak of all this? Why——"

"Because I wish to remind you that it was not always so. There was a time when we could speak directly—with mutual confidence. We must do so again. We must speak as if we were still—friends."

"You ask me to remember; you should ask me to forget. When you have made my years what they have been, when—but I will not reproach you even now. I should have won you; it is not the woman's fault if she is not won. But fault or no fault, you see what my life has been."

"A life successful, powerful."

"I am rich, influential, feared even; but I am more without a home than one of the horses in my stables; as much without human sympathy as a machine in one of my factories."

"But you might have all. Many another since——"

"It may be admirable or it may not, but I cannot change. I have never been envious of a nature that can vary. I lost you, by the injustice——"

"I know what you wish to say. Do not say it—do not accuse me; I acknowledge my guilt before the accusation. But if suffering——"

"Then you know you did me wrong," he

cried, with a quick break of exultation in his voice; "that I was no thief?"

They had spoken hurriedly—with short sentences overlapping and breaking in upon each other, like people speaking from dock and deck when a vessel is rapidly borne away from the shore.

"Yes," she answered. "But you do not—you cannot know all." She paused as one who fears that the distracting influence of her emotion may lead her from a pre-established course. "It is because of that hateful story—that miserable thing—that I am here. I would not have come for myself—I would not have come for yourself. It is only for another that I came."

"For whom?"

"My husband," she replied. "This morning I received a letter from an old woman to whom I had done some kindnesses—the wife of a man named Colby, who was the book-keeper of your old firm—in which she said that her son, a man evidently utterly dissolute and worthless, had stolen from her a statement made by her husband, in which he accused my husband of being the man who stole the money. She said that she could only imagine that her

son intended to use the paper to obtain money from you, and that because of the gratitude she felt toward me, she wished to warn me. Has any such person brought you such a paper ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Have you it now ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You bought this stolen declaration—you paid this man money for it ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You intend to make use of it ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ James,” she said, stepping toward him, “ you must not do it.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because I ask you.”

He laughed harshly, almost brutally.

“ Do you know what you are saying—do you realize what you are asking me to give up ? Have you seen *The Multiple* this morning ? ”

“ What appeared in *The Multiple* was wholly without my husband’s knowledge or sanction. I know that he has always refused to make use of the scandal. He has resisted his temptation nobly ; do you now resist yours.”

The strange parallelism of her present position with that in which she had been placed in

the morning bewildered her. Again she was entreating a man to refrain from doing injury to another, and again the injury from which she besought a man to abstain was the same.

“His temptation!” said Harding, and the dense significance of the word seemed edged with a burning scorn. “His temptation!” he repeated. “What was his temptation? He is honored, praised; it would not add a particle to the esteem in which he is held if he succeeded in sinking me still lower than I am in public appreciation. In lowering me he would not raise himself. Where was his temptation? A temptation in which no active action was required—only mere abstinence. He had only to do nothing, to lose nothing. Did he not know that men must say, ‘See how magnanimous he is.’ Would he have acted as he has, if he had been obliged to act without the world’s knowledge of what was done, as I must if I do what you wish? What is offered to me if I yield? For years I have been a pariah—my name blackened by a shameful story. I am offered liberation from more than physical bondage. I have but to speak, and I am not only free, but I am avenged. Do you think that, with my nature, all these years have not made me

resentful—not made me madly revengeful? Can you believe that now, when, in the first realization of a hope almost un hoped, I stand ready to strike, I shall withhold the blow because the woman who married him rather than me—although she be you—asks me to do so?”

“And yet,” she said, steadily, “you will do it.”

He laughed again, a rattling laugh as hard as the rattle of shaken dice.

“Will do it?” he repeated. “Either you are mad or I. Will do it, because he did not see fit to make use of a slander that lay ready at his hand? Will do it, because when he knew me innocent he did not choose to proclaim me guilty? We are all of us heroes, then, if we only knew it, because we do not bear false witness against our neighbors.”

“But if he thought you guilty?”

“That is impossible. How could he think that I had done what he knew that he himself did?”

“James,” she said, “trust me. I have not done so much for you that I can ask you to do it as a right, but I ask it humbly of your generosity. Do what I wish without further question; and, believe me, if you understood all,

you would not repent it. As you once loved me——”

“There can be no light without shadow—no love without hate. I loved you once—I almost hate you now.”

“James, James,” she cried, coming nearer to him, “will you drive me to it? Will you cruelly compel me——”

“Should you expect mercy from me? When I was innocent you doubted me, and married him who was really guilty.”

“If I can urge nothing that can influence you,” she almost moaned, “I must tell you. Robert Pruden never stole that money.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I know that it was stolen by another.”

“What other?” he asked, in what was almost a gasp.

“My father,” she answered, looking him full in the face.

For a moment neither moved nor spoke. The hum of voices continued in the room beyond, and from the distant street trembled up the noise of traffic. But they heard nothing. To both of them it seemed as if the every-day,

habitual world were far away, as foreign as it might seem to the conscious dead.

“Now you know the truth,” she continued, lowering her voice. “Now you know why I dared to come here. My suffering—your suffering—would not have brought me; suffering is perhaps our lot. The danger that threatened another—my husband—a danger that could be averted by me, was all that made me come—it was my duty. Long ago, before my father died, I learned the truth from him; in his repentance for what he had done, he told me. On the night the money was taken he was concealed in the office, waiting for Colby to finish his work and go. He saw Robert Pruden open the safe and remove some private papers. When he was finally alone he unlocked the safe and took the money. He had speculated and lost. He hoped to return the money, but the loss had been discovered, and when he was able to act, it was too late. With his reputation, he stood above suspicion; you, with your manner of life, laid yourself open to distrust and were condemned. He could do nothing except confess, and that he was never strong enough to do. I never doubted you even when I did not know the truth, or, if I did doubt, it



did not influence my feelings. But you were proud, and from the first, when you knew that you were suspected, you carried yourself with a certain reserve. I perhaps should have sought to make you understand me; but then I did not understand myself. A girl's pride—for a moment's pique she will not utter the word that may assure a future. You held aloof, and in time I married Robert Pruden. Now you know all, and now you will not do what a moment ago you threatened to do."

Again there was silence.

"No," said Harding, and the word edged its way through his closed lips. "I will not be stopped. Do you think that after the injustice of years I shall be deterred by the fact that I may be unjust? The position, for all purposes of freedom or revenge, is the same. I have but to publish this statement. He cannot disprove it; you will not speak, or if you do the world would not heed you. They would say that you were demented—a daughter who betrayed her father would be too unnatural—and even if you were believed, my end would be gained; I should be held innocent. I shall do as I have been done by; the accusation that has been upon me for years will be transferred

to him ; unjustly, perhaps, but why should I alone suffer? ”

“ No, no,” she exclaimed, “ you cannot do it.”

“ You spoke of temptations,” he went on, disregarding her. “ What is my temptation now? How much harder is it for me to resist doing this wrong than it was for him merely to do something that was only fairly right? If I do not do this, what is my future but a continuation of my past—a hell of doubt and scorn? When he withheld, as you say he did, from injuring me, what had he to apprehend? Nothing. He could live on as he always had lived, but I—the man with a story—I must always see the world glance at me askance.”

“ I know,” she said, “ that it is often harder to resist doing wrong than simply to do right—that repression often requires more courage than action. But you will do it—do it for yourself and for me.”

She stepped forward, bending almost as if she would fall at his feet. He, with the first agony of his disappointment, the first fury of his anger past, and the period of doubt begun, stood as if unconscious of her presence.

“ James,” she said, and with self-mocking

bitterness she thought how much her words were an echo of those she had spoken in the morning, "we have not made so very much out of our lives, you and I, but we have not acted wrongly after all. Do not let us spoil all now. There is something strengthening, self-sustaining in suffering. It will not be so hard. Believe me—I tell you so—I myself who have known——"

Still he gave no sign that he was aware that she had spoken to him; impassive in his absorption, he stood seemingly looking through and beyond her, while she, with clasped hands and pale, anxious face, remained waiting his further action. What did he see? The dark stretches of later life, sombre at best, but more sombre for him than for another if he did not act. He must give up all, bid stand still the dark wrong that eclipsed his whole existence; blot out joy and hope such as he had not known in years. With the weapon in his hand he must cast it away, because the blow was unworthy of an honest man; must condemn himself, as but few condemn themselves, for he knew the full measure of his condemnation; must consent to see another honored and himself despised; and worst, bitterest of all, must hear another

praised for refraining from doing something that, though it palely resembled the act he was compelled in honor to perform, was as different from it as the shadow from the substance—something that, from the very weakness of its similarity, made the plaudits that it would win and which he could never hope to hear for his mightier renunciation, the more unbearable. Such was the fate that awaited him, did he do but what he ought in honesty to do.

A slight sigh broke from him. If the silence had not been so perfect she could not have heard it, but as she did, the light of an infinite happiness shone in her eyes.

Picking up the paper that had lain on the desk ever since he had received it, Harding handed it to her. Neither spoke. Dragging the fluttering thing from his grasp, she seized the trembling hand that had held it out to her and pressed it against her side, above her heart, with all her force — pressing it down until he felt the indentation made by a fold of her heavily embroidered dress.

He heard the door close, and, looking up, he found himself alone.

“ AS THE SPARKS FLY UP-  
WARD ”



## “ AS THE SPARKS FLY UP- WARD ”

IT was past the time when the “through” night express should start, but still the ponderous engine stood motionless; the steam escaping with a terrific roar, and mounting high in the air, first in a vigorous jet, then spreading in dull, whitened clouds that soon mingled with and were lost in the denser mass and greater volume of the rolling smoke. The hands of the illuminated clock, placed on the depot wall, had passed the points on the dial that indicated the hour of departure, and now stood at not more than a minute after; but even so small a particle of time was of importance, for this, the night express, was the particular feature of this particular road, and to get it to its destination at the advertised instant was the duty and pride of every employee; for this, every resource of the great corporation

was employed, every sacrifice of other considerations made. Over those miles and miles of shining rails, on which the train must run all night, lay the road from West to East and from East to West, and upon the speed and certainty with which they were covered depended many an important affair—the success or failure of many a business venture, often of many a political combination.

The station-master hurried up to the engine and looked in the window.

"What's the matter, Irby?" he said to the engineer.

"Spurlock's not here," answered the man, who sat on the narrow, transverse seat in the cab, with his hand on the heavy, shining, round-tipped handle of the reverse-lever.

"Where is he?"

"Don't know," replied Irby. "He stepped off five minutes ago, saying he'd be back directly."

"If he isn't here in thirty seconds I'll have to give you another fireman."

Everything indicated readiness for departure. The loungers along the broad, cemented walk of the station—those who had sought a little exercise before the long, cramped ride—



had mounted to the cars ; and the porters, after picking up the little stools placed before the steps of the “sleepers,” stood ready all along the line to swing themselves on to the platforms as soon as the series of jarring jerks with which a train straightens itself out for work, indicated that the “7.30” was off.

The scene as it now presented itself—a minute and more after the time when “No. 47” should have been under way—was characteristically American, for nowhere else in the world is quite its like to be found. The huge arched station—so large that, numerous as were the hard, clear, powerful electric lights, there still were left many areas of gloom—echoed and re-echoed with multitudinous sounds, and, closing your eyes, you might almost have imagined yourself in an asylum for demented noises, the air was so burdened with the sustained uproar, distressed by such brazen clangor, torn by so many a wild shriek. The gleaming steel rails banded the broad, boarded space, stretching in innumerable lines far across to the opposite wall ; now running with the parallel exactness of a copy-book ; now crossing and recrossing each other in what seemed inextricable confusion. Long strings of cars,

their windows all aglow, stood here or there—just arrived, or just on the point of leaving—this train "in," after having run all day along the shores of the great lakes; that ready to plunge into the dark Pennsylvania forests, and hurry away, perhaps, past some flaming oil-well into the more distant coal-fields. People swarmed everywhere—passengers and employees, baggage-men, brakemen, and express-men. Heavy trucks, overloaded with luggage, were wildly trundled through the place; small iron carriages, piled high with mail-bags, were recklessly rolled past; and in and out darted the bearers of flaming torches that cast a wild glare about them as they moved, who, with long-handled hammers tested the car-wheels with ringing blows. And away in the distance, where the immense, arched opening of the station permitted a glimpse of the darkness beyond, gleamed innumerable lights—green, red, and orange—some stationary and arranged in complex designs, others swinging in eccentric circles, or flitting like the *ignes fatui* of swamp-lands, along the ground, now appearing and now disappearing.

"Here he comes!" shouted a voice somewhere in remote darkness.

"Hurry up," commanded the station-master; and, with a running accompaniment of questions, exhortations, and admonitions, lit up by some scattered execrations, a slight man, dressed in the blackened and greasy overalls and "jumper" of a laborer, ran along the walk and mounted the engine.

"Let her go, Dan," he said.

The engineer glanced at the conductor leaning against the wall; saw him quickly shut his watch and wave his hand. One pull on a lever, and the piston-rods began to glide out and in, the huge driving-wheels to revolve, and the train, with almost a dislocating shock, so hurried had been the start, was finally off.

"What was it, Jeff?" said Irby.

"Why," answered Spurlock, with a hardly perceptible hesitation, "a little celebration of my own. Do you forget what night it is?"

"No," answered the other and older man, a trifle sharply. "But what did you promise me?"

"It's only once a year," responded Spurlock, sullenly, "and I haven't touched a thing for ten weeks."

Irby did not answer, but peered out into the darkness through the narrow cab window.

The depot had been left behind, and the engine was now passing through the outer business belt of the great city. Huge, silent warehouses, with their shutters closed, quite as if they had gone to sleep with iron lids shut over their innumerable eyes, were to be seen along the deserted streets ; high chimneys here and there rose above the roofs—they might have been columns supporting the leaden sky—the dull clouds of smoke that lazily seemed to overflow them only distinguishable from the dark heavens by their greater density. It had been snowing during the early evening, but the flakes had melted as they fell, and the ill-paved roads were full of spreading pools that caught the rays cast by the glowing embers in the engine's fire-box, and, seeming to hold them for an instant in dull reflection, threw them weakly back. And now the pavements cease altogether ; no longer are there any gas-lamps or electric lights to reveal the dripping squalor, but as one looks ahead there are to be seen by the spreading illumination of the headlight only the shining, converging rails, and between them, and on either side, the sodden, half-frozen earth. Now only infrequent buildings start into view ; but there appear instead long,

shadowy lines of freight-cars, apparently innumerable, drawn up on either side of the track, by which the engine thunders with reverberating clatter—the strange but still familiar characters, letters, and names on their many colored sides—the stars, the diamonds, the crosses, the often-repeated initials, the numbers, reaching sometimes into the tens of thousands—only showing for an instant in the dim rays cast by the single light in the engine, and then quickly blotted out by the broad hand of darkness. At length these, too, are gone, and now there is nothing to be seen but the occasional hut of some switch-tender, and the constantly recurring telegraph poles that so rapidly flash in and out of sight. Far behind appears in the sky a dull, orange glow that marks the position of the town that has been left behind, but all before is unbroken blackness. Now, at last, the train has reached the open country. Irby pushes the throttle-valve still further open, and the engine, with a quiver, almost such as a spirited horse will give at the touch of the spur, plunges more swiftly forward, and finally tears along at almost full running speed, over fifty miles an hour, through the night.

The narrow place in which the men are

seated, face to face, is but dimly illuminated. They are neither of them particularly exceptional-looking persons; you might see their like almost any day through an engine's window and not turn to look again, and still their faces are not without a certain stern significance—the significance to be found in the countenances of most men who have for any length of time held what might be called "non-commissioned" office in the army of labor, where, though opportunity of honor is rare, responsibility is great and incessant.

Irby, ten years the older of the two, heavy, but with a muscular strength that enables him to move with perfect ease in spite of his stoutness, has in his countenance that indescribable something that indicates firmness, even obstinacy; while in the mobile features, more shifting glance, and more changeful expression of his companion, you could as readily detect the equally evident, but more subtle evidences of weakness and irresolution. And yet he was a pretty fellow enough with his thick, lustrous, black hair, and his small, pointed mustache, his highly colored cheeks and his dull, dark eyes. Of graceful build too—his belt was drawn about a waist as small almost as a wom-

an's—slight but lithesome, a man to surprise you with unsuspected strength.

"Don't it make you feel, Dan, as if we were regularly out in the cold," he said, "to be on this job to-night?"

"Well, you see," answered Irby, argumentatively, "all the other boys have got sweethearts or wives, and it's only natural they should want the evening to themselves. Now, what's Christmas Eve to us—you, who haven't got a belonging in the world, as you say, and I——"

Irby paused. Whether or not he saw something worthy of notice in what seemed the impenetrable night, Spurlock could not determine, but the engineer looked through the window with what appeared increased attention.

"'Tain't much like one's general notion of a Christmas," he added at length.

"No," answered Spurlock.

Neither spoke again for some time, and Spurlock busied himself with the flapping canvas curtain that gave doubtful shelter to the occupants of the cab, for the icy wind blew briskly as the scudding clouds attested.

"Let me see," said Irby at length. "This

time of the year rather lends itself to reckoning—how long is it now that we've travelled along together?"

"Going on eight months," answered Spurlock, "from the time when you first set me straight."

Irby glanced across at the man before him. "Set him straight." Yes, he had "set him straight," and the memory came to him of what Spurlock had been; a picture rose before him of how Spurlock looked when he first saw him; a thin, bent form, with pallid face, and trembling, it would almost seem palsied hands, dressed in a mysterious garment that was only a remote suggestion of a coat, and with all his other clothes correspondingly frayed and tattered; a being, coming from no one knew where, and going no one cared whither—slinking out to bask in the sunshine, as if doubtful if the world, which afforded him so little, might not grudge and deny him even this; leading one of those mysterious, almost reptilian existences in the dark holes and corners of the earth, which, were they not so common, would seem more awful and more significant, but which, seen every day, we scarcely notice and easily allow to pass from memory.



Irby had first seen the ill-looking creature loitering about the confines of the station, sometimes penetrating even to the engine-yard and standing at gaze before the big, resplendent, perfectly "groomed" locomotive—looking at it revengefully, as if resentful of the fact that this thing of iron and steel should receive such care, when he, a creature of flesh and blood, was so destitute. Such as he was, he had been the jest, the jeer of the whole place. There was no one so insignificant that he did not dare to scoff at him, and it seemed that there was no indignity that the poor creature would not endure. But one day from his lofty post Irby had noticed that a row was going on. In that neighborhood—in the circles in which his locomotive moved, that was a thing of no uncommon occurrence, but this particular difficulty seemed more serious than was commonly the case.

"What's the matter?" he shouted.

"Joe Bannager's been givin' the tramp mor'n he can stand, an' he's showed fight," was the answer.

Irby let himself down from the engine and joined the crowd just in time to see the burly Bannager, to the admiration of the on-lookers,

very neatly knocked out of time by the now animated vagabond.

"If you've got spirit enough for that," said Irby, looking curiously at the now erect figure of the stranger, "you've got spirit enough to be a man. Come with me."

He had taken Spurlock over to the engine, and in its torrid shade had inspected him more thoroughly.

"If I gave you money, would you drink it up?" he asked.

"Try me and see," said the man.

Irby handed him a bill, and the next day there had appeared before him a person whom he did not at first recognize. It was Spurlock, in a suit of the poorest clothing, but clean and decent looking.

"Give me something to do," he said.

Irby again looked at him scrutinizingly. It had always been his—Irby's—boast, that he knew a man who had anything in him when he saw one, and after a moment's contemplation, which the other had borne unflinchingly, he spoke doubtfully.

"My fireman's laid up, perhaps I might get you taken on."

"All right," answered Spurlock. "You've

picked me out of the gutter, now set me on the walk."

And this, Irby thought, was the same man who now sat opposite to him. Indeed, Spurlock had changed. As he quickly emerged from his state of degradation, he displayed unexpected intelligence, exhibiting a surprising knowledge about all sorts of unlikely things. Irby, who had started in life with only a limited knowledge of reading and writing, but who had graduated long ago with "honors" from the great University of the Newspapers, was thoroughly able to appreciate higher acquirements than his own, and both marvelled and admired. Spurlock never spoke of his past, and Irby had never asked him a question. That it was not the usual past of a man in his position Irby felt sure; but they were both of that world that should in truth be called the "great world" instead of the insignificant portion that now bears that name, where few questions are asked for the reason that a close knowledge of the strange haps and mishaps of life has dulled curiosity. Day and night they had travelled together in the little cab, over thousands of miles, through heat and cold, through storm and sunshine, and gradually

there had grown up in Irby a real friendship for this being whom he had, as it were, created. He looked at Spurlock, and reflecting that had it not been for him, the alert, self-respecting man who was now his companion would have been in a pauper's grave or leading a life than which any death would be better, he took credit to himself for what he could almost regard as his handiwork, and beamed upon him with something like affection.

"Seeing the time it is," said Spurlock, at length, "I've got a Christmas present for you, Dan, and I don't know but I might as well give it to you now."

He reached up and took down his coat from the place where it hung, then drawing out a tobacco-pouch, cheaply embroidered, handed it across to the engineer. Irby took it, opened it, and found instead of tobacco a carefully folded bill.

"The money you lent me that time, you know," explained Spurlock.

Irby stretched out his hand, with the powerful, blunted fingers, to the younger man, who took it and shook it roughly with an awkward consciousness.

The wide plains that lay around the city had

been swiftly traversed, and now the track ran over land partly uncleared. In and out the engine darted through the thick woods, plunging into the narrow openings among the dark, serrated trunks and spreading branches, as if into some tunnelled mountain.

"You've been the making of me, Dan," Spurlock went on, "and if I come to anything now it'll be your doing."

"The engine's seemed a different place since you've been on it, Jeff," he said, quietly, "and so I guess we're square."

Another of those long silences followed, which will occur between people who are constantly together — one of those pauses that indicate intimacy more fully than any speech.

"I wasn't always what you found me, Dan," said Spurlock, finally.

Irby glanced at his companion.

"But I began bad," the other went on, "and I kept on growing worse. I was the black sheep of a particularly white flock, and, by contrast, my color only showed up the more. Where I was born, or what or when, doesn't matter. I wouldn't like to show disrespect for any of my highly respectable relations by

bringing them into any such unfortunate society as mine."

He paused, and the expression of recklessness that had lain on his countenance, almost like a mask—so evidently unnatural was it—seemed suddenly to be snatched away.

"The fiend take it, Dan," said he, "there's something in this cursed time that sets you remembering."

Irby's face darkened; it appeared as if the past had also come up before him with unusual vividness, and that the vision was disquieting and painful.

"I don't think I ever came near being respectable in my life but once," continued Spurlock, dully, almost as if some strange power were forcing him to speak—as if volition had nothing to do with it.

"But," he went on, "we're generally standing on the ground even when we're looking at the clouds. Oh, of course it was a woman that did it. You, Dan, you can't understand that; you—you've the face of a true misogynist. You see," he broke out, "I haven't forgot all that my little 'fresh-water' college taught me. You're the kind that are superior to that inferior influence."

"I really believe that I could have reformed then," murmured Spurlock after another pause, "for I loved her. Strange how you feel when you really love a woman. There seems to come out of the very holes and corners of your being, feelings and sentiments and aspirations that you never knew you had before. Mind I don't say that the same cause doesn't sometimes work a very different way on your nature—doesn't stir up and set moving a number of dark, ugly things also—passions, jealousies, hatreds—that you never suspected were in you. Oh, it's a queer thing this love—it's like a streak of varnish across the natural wood that brings out the beauty of the grain and the unsightliness of the knots as well. I loved her from the first time I set my eyes on her pretty, pale face. Oh, don't be frightened. I'm not going to tell you a yarn, for there's none to tell. But Agnes Holcombe was the only one who could ever have made anything out of me."

"Women," said Irby, slowly, "do a deal of good when they don't—do a deal of harm."

"She could have been the making of me. But circumstances——"

"How long ago was it?" interrupted Irby.

"About eighteen months."

Eighteen months. With the instinct that leads everyone to measure the nearness or remoteness of an event by its relation in time to his own life, Irby thought of himself as he had been a year and a half before. That, he remembered, was before his quarrel with Mabel — before the final separation. He ground his teeth in sudden rage. Could he not get the miserable affair out of his mind ; must everything he heard or saw always serve to remind him of it ?

The train had now for some time been on its way, dashing by isolated farm-houses usually at this hour merely black shapes in the dim landscape, but to-night with windows all alight ; past scattered groups of cottages where the smoke rolling comfortably from the chimneys suggested glowing and generous hearths ; in and out of villages where a quickly opened, quickly closed door would often suddenly disclose some bright interior.

And now the spreading glow in the sky before them proved that they were again approaching a city. Stronger, brighter, more diffused it grew as the train spun swiftly on ; and finally the many detached points of light showed that they were quite near. Again the



engine plunged among long lines of coal-trucks and freight-cars—again clattered by the echoing walls of great factories, and finally, at decreased speed, puffed into the city. As it chanced, in this particular place the tracks lay along streets that crossed some of the great thoroughfares, and sometimes for a short distance even ran in them. It was hardly more than nine o'clock, and the sidewalks were thronged. It seemed as if the whole town had turned out, and yet there must have been many who were at home. Every shop was open—was brilliant with the best display it was possible for it to make. Here, as at the place they had left, it had evidently been snowing during the day, but here the wind had blown boisterously and long enough to dry the walks and bring a crackling sheet of ice on the surface of the street puddles. There was a briskness in the air well accordant with the time, and there was an animation in the crowd that clearly indicated that it was no concourse such as might ordinarily be found in and before the stores. It was much larger, it was much more alert, and it was much more self-satisfied and self-important; certainly it was much jollier. You might have jostled it as

much as you pleased without exciting anything but good-natured remonstrance; you could tread on its toes with nearly perfect impunity. It was a true Christmas crowd in every aspect and every attribute—baskets, bundles, and all—and as the great engine slowly ground its way along, the bell sounding with regular brazen clang, the two men in the cab gazed upon the animated spectacle with greedy eyes. They looked upon it all as aliens in a double sense—separated from it in situation and in mood—and the knowledge of their twofold remoteness filled each with a rebellious bitterness that strengthened as they went on. It all seemed like some mocking show prepared for their special torment—some deluding mirage as tantalizing as the semblance of water is to the thirsty traveller of the desert.

The stop in the dark, nearly deserted station was not long, and soon they were out again in the populous quarters of the town. It was Christmas time at its brightest and best—cheerful *Noël* in its most comfortable mood. It was Christmas Eve—more mirthful, better perhaps than Christmas itself—as a promise is often better than a fulfilment. That feeling of the time that calls upon all to "eat, drink, and

be merry," found most ample manifestation—the sense of human fellowship that, let what may be said, is just a little stronger on and about the wonderful December day than at any other time of the year, was evident everywhere. Gazing like prisoners through prison bars, the two men avidly drank in the scene, its very geniality making them the more morose.

And as the engine passed on again into the desolate country—between the brown banks and broken fences—the men were almost tempted to rub their eyes and ask themselves if really what they had seen had not been a dream, so sudden had been its appearance, so apparently doubtful its reality even while it was before them, and so absolute its eclipse.

"Agnes Holcombe," said Irby, half to drive from his mind the memories that tormented him, half to lead Spurlock to talk further of himself.

"Agnes Holcombe," repeated Spurlock. "That, of course, wasn't her real name, as I soon found out."

"Not her real name?" Irby half asked.

"No," said Spurlock. "Though there's but little to tell, I might as well tell you that little. It all happened out at Arapago."

"Arapago?" repeated Irby, glancing sharply around.

"Yes, Arapago," continued Spurlock. "It was one of my respectable times—when I was still struggling. I was clerk in one of the big freight depots. One night I was sitting in that park that looks out over the lake when I saw a woman on the next bench to mine. I saw that she was pretty and that she was crying. The two things were too much for me—they ought to be for any man. I made an excuse to speak to her, she answered me and we had a long talk. I asked her where she lived, but although she would not tell me, she promised to meet me on the night after the next, at the same place. She kept her word, and it was the first of many meetings. Dan, I loved that woman, and, what is the strangest thing, I loved her as I never loved another. It almost seemed as if I didn't want her to love me; why, man, the ground she walked on, it seemed to me, was the only thing that I was fit to touch. There are some women who can make you feel like that, though, like as not, they're laughing at you all the time. One night I followed her to find out if I could know something about her."

"Well," said Irby, impatiently, and yet hesitatingly.

"I followed her to a pretty little house just where the city begins to break up and you get a little air and space."

"Yes," said Irby, looking at his fireman with a curious glitter in his eyes.

"It was in Canestoga Street, number one hundred and seventeen—queer how you'll remember those little things—and there she went in, with that air you know that one has when going into a familiar place."

"Yes," said Irby, as he leaned forward to look at one of the gauges, and then again fixed his eyes on Spurlock with the same intensity of gaze.

"She was mad enough when she found out what I'd done, but she soon forgave me. And it was there we met when her husband was away." He paused, then added quickly, "What's the matter, Dan?"

"Nothing," answered Irby; "go on."

"Yes, and when he was there she'd come to the park sometimes; but I generally saw her in the garden. I learned all about her from the people in the neighborhood, but I never let her know that I knew the truth, though she

must have suspected that I did. I've seen enough not to appear to know any more than a woman wants that you should. She was married, so they told me, to a man a good deal older than herself, who, though he was generally well considered, was thought by the neighbors a little too strict and glum for her. I imagined I saw how it was. He was an engineer on one of the Western roads, away half the time, and the poor young thing was left all alone. I think he made her pretty unhappy, and so the inevitable happened, and I happened to be the inevitable, though in this case the inevitable wasn't so very much after all."

"Go on," said Irby.

"Though neither of us ever spoke about it, I gathered from what I picked up that it was only when her husband—Shaw, that was the engineer's name—was away that I could appear. Then, when it was dark enough, I'd slip over the white picket-fence and sit with her in the arbor under the grape-vines. I never kissed her but—once——"

Before Spurlock had time to do more than instinctively raise his arm in defence, Irby was upon him, and with an iron wrench that he had snatched from its place had felled him

with one blow to the floor, where he lay, an almost shapeless heap, on the hot, riveted iron plates.

What Irby consciously noticed next was that the train was swiftly running over the causeway built across the widespreading marshes that lay an hour and more beyond the last stopping-place. It was not that the sky was clearer and therefore gave more light, but there was more of it, stretching as it did to the horizon, and Irby could distinctly see the dull, sullen waters above which, on the embankment, the locomotive so swiftly moved along; could mark the acres and acres of low-lying land partially covered with rank grass and partially with tall, tangled, aquatic plants. It was a sad, desolate place at any time, but now, seen only by the uncertain light of the stars—the wind had torn the clouds from the sky—it was indeed forbidding and awful.

In Irby's mind was an uneasy consciousness that something unusual had happened, what, he half knew, yet hardly could have told. With the instinct of his calling, he glanced first at all the cocks and levers about him, then looked cautiously around. Yes, there it was,

more like some bundle of old clothes than the form of a man, for Spurlock had fallen face down, with his arms doubled up under him, and there was no pallid countenance, no worn, blackened hand to show what was really there. Irby did not start; he had half-prepared himself for what he was to see, and only gazed intently, almost apathetically, at the object at his feet. Then his eye caught something that needed attention in the machinery, and he, with action almost as automatic as that of any one of the engine's appliances, set it right. The fires must have burnt low, he thought; but how could he replenish them? Dulled as his mind was, it seemed an insurmountable difficulty that Spurlock's body lay on the floor. How would it be possible to open the furnace door? how shovel in the coal? But gradually perception became clearer—that the engine should be run all right seemed to him more important than anything else—and he left the shelf-like seat on which he had been sitting, and picking up the body carefully, placed it in a corner, with the back against the wall of the cab and the side of the opposite bench. Then he threw open the furnace-door. With the glare of what seemed to him the nether pit,



the tongues of flame, writhing and twisting in the strong draft, leaped up, licking around the iron edges of their prison-house. The whole place was illuminated with the fierce, ruddy light, and the face of the man whom he had struck down seemed to gain even something more than its natural color. Drawing back the canvas screen he grasped Spurlock's shovel and cast the coals into the furnace's mouth; then he carefully drew together the curtain, shut the opened door, mounted to his seat, and glanced down the straight road that seemed almost to slip under the engine and glide away. Fancies, rather than such positive thoughts as it would seem should be the natural and unavoidable outcome of the situation, filled his brain. First, there started into quick vision, the astonishment, the horror of the officials, when he should ride into the next station with a murdered man on the engine with him. There seemed something so grotesquely ludicrous in the idea, that he almost laughed aloud. Then he listlessly thought of what the newspapers would say—of the heavy headlines and sensational sentences. People would talk about it the next day—Christmas Day—Christmas of all days. The sense of the awful inharmony

between what he had done and what the feeling of the time enjoined, brought him the first thrill of horror that he had felt. His regular respiration was broken by a quick, raucous gasp, and on his brow he felt the chilly dew of terror.

Christmas Eve! It seemed to Irby that everything of any consequence to him had happened on Christmas Eve. It was on a Christmas Eve that he had been married; it was on the next Christmas Eve that the baby was born; it was only just before Christmas Eve, a year past, that they—Mabel and he—had their final misunderstanding and had parted; he swearing that though she might wish to seek his forgiveness she should not have the chance. So he had gone to a distant place, where, under a new name—perhaps even then apprehensive that he might not be able to withstand her pleading should she attempt to soften his heart—he had sought new employment, while she had fled he knew not whither.

He had often wondered, sometimes doubted, whether he had not been unjust to her. There were even times when he had accused himself of blind cruelty to her, and had felt impelled, then and there, to seek her out wherever she

might be, and ask her forgiveness. But he had been too deeply hurt ; the wound, to one of his nature, was too grievous to permit any such action, and he had quickly fallen back into his old state of obduracy and inert despair. For days before he had finally spoken to her, he had watched and waited, and reasoned and argued until it almost seemed that he had lost all power of continuous thought, so distracted had he become ; and now, since they had been separated, he had weighed the evidence again and again ; had never ceased laboriously to revolve the matter in his mind ; to seek to comprehend her motives and to test his own. He could not have made a mistake. It was true that she had never confessed anything, but again she had never denied anything, merely contenting herself with an indignant silence, or with impetuous assertion that she disdained to defend herself against suspicion, adding that if he did not trust her he did not love her, and that they had best part.

And so he, unable to control the fierce jealousy, the rugged wrong-side of his strong love, and she feigning or feeling the deep indignation of affronted womanhood, had given to the wind the vows they had both made, that

they would thereafter cling to one another, even until the last great parting. No, he must have been right—there was so much to justify him. Though he had imagined her so different from other women, was there really any reason why she should be so? There was her own sister—beautiful, headstrong, erring Cora—and might not Mabel really have been—was it not indeed reasonable to believe that she was as vain, as frivolous, as light as the other? Was it not highly probable that as one sister had been, so the other would be? And yet at first he had felt that she was of another nature than this wilful being who had fled from the tedium of a life in which there was only peace and sufficiency, to seek the excitement and lavishness that she seemed to crave—had fled from the small but pretty house, on the city's outskirts, where Mabel had seemed so contented, and where during the long, lustrous summer evenings he had timidly courted her; where, on the brisk, brilliant December night, three years ago, he had finally married her.

It was about her sister, Cora, that they had had their first quarrel—he peremptorily refusing ever to let his wife see or communicate with one whom he had thought so unworthy of

her love and countenance, and she, only after argument and contention, finally yielding. It had always been disagreeable to him to think of Cora as his wife's sister. It was with real relief that, in the first year of their marriage, he had listened to Mabel as she told him that she had received news of Cora's death in one of the hospitals of an Eastern city, and reflected that she, whose life was so worthless to herself and others, could no longer come between them.

Yes, Mabel had always been light-hearted and pleasure-loving. But granting only this, was not that enough to cause difficulty in time? Was he—middle-aged, serious, and a trifle taciturn—the man to satisfy such a woman—pretty, with the desire, and even the right, to have her beauty recognized; naturally longing for the enjoyment that youth demands as its peculiar prerogative? Was it not only natural that she should fancy some one nearer her own age, some one with a readier wit, and more adaptable manner? He was as conscious of his own shortcomings as he was of his inability to overcome them; but he nevertheless suffered grievously, and had been continually on the lookout for some sign of disapproval, of dislike, on her part. It is true it never came, but he

was always apprehensive ; it was the seed-time for suspicion, and the soil in which the grain might come to deadly fruit was morbidly rich. It was only to be expected that he should hearken to what people said. When he had received the first anonymous letter he had sworn that he would not read the thing ; but when, with trembling hand and quick-beating heart, he had first glanced along the cowardly, feigned writing—as he deliberately read it again, as he had read all that succeeded it, he had in his heart believed what was said. Had she not acted strangely for a long time, as if she were keeping something from him ? All seemed calculated to strengthen him in his apprehensions, all to bear witness against her. And when he had shown her the letters, with their blackening tale, though she had appeared indignant, outraged, even then she had denied nothing, and had refused to defend, to exculpate herself. It had been a brief but violent scene, and then they—she proudly, and he besottedly jealous, and passionately inflexible—had separated.

It was a common enough story, as he knew, but in spite of this knowledge it seemed strangely pathetic to him. And this had

been the end of the life that had begun so happily, although it had not been the end of torturing thought, of continual questionings, of occasional self-crimination. Now, with a sense almost of relief, he reflected that the time of doubt was past for him. Since he had heard Spurlock's confession he need torment himself no more. He had been right. Her fancy had been taken by the good looks and careless grace of the stranger, and she had forgotten his love, lost her love—if there had really ever been any—for him.

It did not require any great time for these thoughts to arise, to eddy giddily about, to crowd one another in Irby's mind. And yet—he was thinking more calmly and collectedly now—it was strange that he should have felt so deeply about it all, at this late day, as to have been moved to kill this man. And then he reflected how wonderful it was that the poor creature whom in pity he had befriended and rescued, should have been the man who had robbed him of his happiness. The injustice—what seemed to him almost the ingratitude of it—struck him with sudden force, and he glanced with quick-kindling hatred at the motionless something in the corner.

And all the while the engine sped on, thundering over bridges and roaring through "cuttings," a terrible, it might almost seem in its awful momentum, an unmanageable force—sped on, pouring a dense cloud of smoke from its swaying stack, and flinging into the air myriads of glowing, dancing sparks that streamed behind in a cometic trail!

Now another city lies not far ahead, as Irby well knows. Shall he tell what has happened and give himself up? Uncertain what to do he determines to do nothing. The stop he knows will be but short. At so late an hour there will be but few about; none at all who will think of mounting on the engine. The cab is so high from the ground that no one passing on the platform of the station can see into it. Why not go as he had come, without allowing a person to know what had occurred; then, in the long unbroken run to the next stopping place, he would have time to reflect—to decide upon his ultimate course.

Crouching over the lever, he brought the engine up to the building that gave shelter to the travellers, and stopped it, trembling, before the lighted windows. The sudden illumination disconcerted him somewhat and he turned



to adjust the tattered, greasy curtain more carefully. His change of position had brought the body within his gaze, and he looked at it now for the first time coolly and curiously. Blood stood in almost inky black spots on the white face—the distended arms lay along the floor in flaccid, impotent immobility. Had it not been cowardly to take the man unawares; should he not have given Spurlock a chance to defend himself? He thought vaguely that if the deed were to be done over again he would prefer not to do it in that way.

"Merry Christmas!"

The voice seemed almost at his elbow, and he gave a great start. But it was only one of the station people, whom he knew, hurrying by on the platform below him.

"Merry Christmas!"

He was afraid that if he did not answer the man might return, and so he shouted the cheery, conventional greeting after him in a voice that he did not seem to recognize as his own.

The time the train could remain at this place was nearly up, and he glanced at his clock to see if even then he might not set the engine in motion. The hands stood exactly at

twelve, folded together in a manner that suggested palms closely pressed in prayer; and now, as he sat waiting for the moment when he might be off, the chimes rang out from a church near at hand. In the clear night air they sounded merrily, and it seemed to him that he had never heard sounds so sweet, so holy. He knew what it meant; they were ringing for the midnight service of Christmas. Had he not gone once with her, and as the memory came back to him—it seemed almost brought to him by the wind-borne cadences of the bells—he bowed his head on his hand that rested on the cold, hard handle of the steel beam, and a sob broke from him and left him trembling and afraid. He thought of the momentous event in remembrance of which the bells were ringing—the birth of the Child that was born into the world to bring the message of hope and of salvation; to teach that lesson of gentleness and peace that the world had never known before—that it has only so imperfectly learned. "Peace on earth and good-will toward men." He turned again and glanced at the upward staring face in the corner. The contrast between word and fact was so terrible, so complete, that its realization

overcame him, and in his sudden agony he again sobbed aloud.

On flew the train. The flat, open country was crossed, and the way now lay among high hills that soon would become mountains. Irby felt that there was something threatening in their ragged outline and wished himself back again in the level land. Then he tried to dismiss such senseless, such insane ideas from his mind, and sought to reason, and to resolve, but found he could do neither. Was he becoming mad, or had he been mad all the time? It was a new thought, and he pondered over it diligently.

He seemed to hear a noise as if some one were moving, and glanced around. Spurlock stirred uneasily, raised himself slowly on his elbow, then, in an instant, was on his feet. It was evident that complete intelligence had returned with renewed physical strength, his still vigorous youth making sudden recovery possible. He threw himself instantly into a position of defence, as if his last conscious thought was still in his mind, or was the first to return to it.

"Dan," he cried, "what's the matter? Have you gone mad?"

But Irby did not answer. The knowledge

that, after all, he had not killed his companion filled him for an instant with strange relief; then the old, fierce hate returned, and he looked at the other threateningly.

"What is it, Dan?" said Spurlock, entreatingly; "can't you tell me?"

Still Irby did not speak.

"Can't you say something?" continued Spurlock.

"No," answered Irby. "I'm not crazy, whatever you may think, although perhaps I ought to be."

"Then what is it?"

"You were telling me a story."

"Yes."

"Do you remember there was—a—woman in it?"

"Yes."

"She," said Irby, calmly enough, "was my wife."

"It isn't true, Dan; it can't be true," almost shrieked Spurlock, raising his voice high above the roar of the train.

"It is true," answered Irby.

"But, Dan," implored Spurlock, "I never knew, I never could have suspected. She had another name."

"Shaw was my name then—is my real name now."

"But I swear to you, swear to you as I hope for salvation on the day of judgment, that there was nothing."

"I know," said Irby, slowly, "and I believe you. But you said that she told you that she loved you. You confessed that yourself, and isn't that enough?"

"And what are you going to do?"

"What I started to do," answered Irby.

"No, Dan," cried Spurlock, "don't say that, don't do that. If I've done you a wrong, I didn't mean it, and——"

"I don't pretend," answered Irby, sullenly, "that I can see the thing clear. I only know what I have felt, and what I feel. There may not be any justice in it, but justice is for them who can think, and I can't. I only know that you're the man that came between us, that I tried to find then, and that I've found at last."

"And you're going to kill me?" asked Spurlock, now, with entire calmness; "is that what you mean?"

"Yes," said Irby.

"Then I tell you what it is," continued

Spurlock, with perfect coolness, though with a certain quickness of utterance; "I haven't done anything to you knowingly, and if you try that again I'm going to defend myself. You know I'm not afraid, and that I'll make a good fight."

"All the better," said Irby, grimly; "I'll feel it the less after it is over."

"But look here," Spurlock went on; "do you propose that we settle this here, and now?"

"Yes," answered Irby.

"Then I'd like to say something," said Spurlock, seating himself, but watching his companion carefully. "We're both strong men. I'm as likely to do you an injury as you me. We might both meet with an accident, and then what would become of the train?"

Irby did not answer. After what had passed, this calm parleying about life and death did not strike him as in the least unnatural. Whether or not he should kill Spurlock then and there, or wait until later, seemed to him a matter that might be talked over quite calmly and collectedly.

"It's our duty," said Spurlock, "to look out for the train, whatever we may feel ourselves."

Irby thought of the scores of sleeping pas-

sengers and hesitated. What Spurlock said was true. A struggle between them in such confined quarters would indeed be something determined and dangerous, and though he had no doubt as to its outcome, still Spurlock could very easily do him an injury that would incapacitate him.

"I think you're right," he answered, briefly, and then he again sat down, for he had risen when he had first spoken. "There's more coal needed, put it on."

Spurlock threw open the furnace-door, again allowing the ruddy glow to play over the place; cast half a dozen shovelfuls of coal on the embers fanned by the draft to almost a white heat, then closed the heavy iron shutter, and took his place opposite Irby.

Mile on mile they rode in silence, hardly looking at each other. The lights were all out now in the houses along the road; the landscape unbroken by a gleam anywhere. It was like travelling through some lately deserted land.

"Dan," said Spurlock, at length, "I don't speak because I want you to let up on me, but you know you're the last man in the world I'd harm."

"I know it," answered Irby, shortly.

Then again there was silence, lasting for minutes and miles.

"If there's no way out of this," said Spurlock, once more speaking, "I'd like, Dan, to understand it a little better. I want to know what I've done to you."

Should he answer him, Irby thought. He knew that he could not give expression to the least part of what he had known and suffered, but the instinct that makes even the bravest sometimes cry out when they are hurt, forbade silence.

"It was you who spoiled the only happiness that I ever had," he said, relentlessly; "it was you who destroyed my confidence in her."

It appeared incomprehensible that he could sit there so calmly discussing his own misery with the man who had been the cause of it; tossing reasons back and across, as if it were the most ordinary subject. But so much had happened to him that he had not thought possible that the position only caused him momentary surprise.

"Yes," said Spurlock. "But I didn't know—I couldn't look ahead."

"But you must have understood that harm was bound to come somewhere—to some one."



"A man doesn't stop to think," answered Spurlock, "at such a time."

"Some one was bound to suffer," said Irby.

"Well," exclaimed Spurlock, bitterly, "I think we've all done that—all."

"I thought it was bad enough when I lost the child," continued Irby, disregarding the other's speech; "but to lose her! A man doesn't marry a woman unless he has trust in her, and to such as I, who have never had a chance to believe much of anything, it's about the only faith that's given to them. When you take away such belief you're robbing them of everything in this world and the next, for some woman's all the religion many a man's got. She can make him believe that something's right, and that right's something, and when you find out that she has been deceiving you, there doesn't seem to be anything anywhere. She's not only been a worse woman, but, Spurlock, I've been a worse man since then."

His first hesitancy was past now, and he was talking unconstrainedly, almost argumentatively.

"I suppose, Dan," Spurlock hastened to say, "it's only natural that you should feel the way you do; I suppose I'd do the same in

your place ; but let's try and be reasonable. I grant that you've got grounds of complaint against me, and I'm willing to give you the satisfaction you want. That's only square. But, Dan, we've been friends so long, mates on the engine for some considerable time now, and it isn't as if I'd been a stranger, and you'd learned this thing."

"No," assented Irby.

"If I should give you revenge, I owe you gratitude, and whatever comes, I'm not going to forget that."

Another city was near, as they both well knew, a city where a longer stay would be made than at any place since they had started on the long ride.

"In ten minutes we'll be in the depot," said Spurlock ; "what's to happen then ?"

"Nothing," answered Irby, after a moment's consideration.

"We'll take the train through ?"

"Yes, we'll take the train through," answered Irby.

The track, after passing the station, ran directly over a great bridge that spanned a broad

river, and the train, with carefully diminished speed, almost crawled along, high over the rushing stream that beat with such strong current against the massive piers. It was still perfectly dark, and the two men felt rather than saw the black waters rolling beneath them. Slowly, it would seem for the first time almost timidly, the engine rolled on, but soon the measured clang—the almost rhythmic reverberation of the iron girders, as the wheels ground over them—suddenly ceased; was succeeded by a more confused and unbroken din, and wheeling around a bend in the shore, the locomotive took up a swifter pace, and soon the lights glittering along the wharves, and the gas-lamps shining in rows up and down the steep streets, were lost from sight.

It was a straight "run in" now for the metropolis, unbroken by another halt.

For a time the landscape was obscured by the flying flakes, for the train had run into a snow-squall and the air was full of the whirling, downy particles. Finally the storm passed, or the train passed it, and as the engine tore on, the two men saw that the ground beside the track, lit by the dancing light of the cab windows, was unbrokenly white.

The engine frequently raced by small way stations, for the country along the river was more thickly settled than any through which it had passed ; but they were all dark, or with only a signal-light at some switch, and so the time passed, the train grinding swiftly on. At length, at one place larger than the rest, there shot up into the darkness strange, lambent flames that caught and held, though it was no strange sight to them, the gaze of both the men. Nearer, it was easy to see that they rose from the great chimneys of an iron mill that, like huge stationary torches, lit up all around. Of vivid green when they sprang from the chimney's mouths they twisted away in strange orange convolutions, fantastic and fascinating. Now the windows of the wide-spreading buildings, row after row, came into view ; and now, through an opening, could be seen the glowing interior, with glimpses of dark, diabolic forms and of brilliant masses of heated metal that either flowed in slow, fiery stream, or beneath the blows of ponderous hammers cast off bewildering showers of sparks. But, like all else, this was speedily left behind.

"Dan," said Spurlock, finally, "there's one thing I wish you'd do."

"What?" asked Irby.

"Shake hands with me for the time that's past—when we didn't know."

Irby hesitated a moment, then held out his hand to his companion; Spurlock seized and shook it silently.

"We'll be in the city in a little more than an hour, now," continued Spurlock, "and I thought we'd better settle up everything and then start fresh."

Irby nodded.

"They gave me a letter for you just as we were leaving, that had been waiting for you at the office," Spurlock went on; "but the hurry of starting drove it out of my head, and," Spurlock smiled grimly, "you knocked it out."

He drew a letter from his coat and handed it to Irby.

The day had just broken and the first tinges of anything like color appeared in the sky. It was still dark, but the shape of the great, swelling headlands across the broad river that flowed along unfrozen, and with swollen flood, could now, with difficulty, be distinguished. It was light enough, however, for Irby to read the direction on the envelope, and as he did so his

face, already so pale, became a duller white and he slightly trembled.

Then he hastily tore open the letter, and read in the dim but strengthening light :

“DAN, DEAR: I do not know why I write to you at this time unless it is for the very reason that it is this time. The day that is so near, is so closely connected with so much that was most important to me, and must be so to you—that is, if you ever think of me and the past at all—that I have dared to do it. I know that you have done all in your power to make it impossible for me to reach you—all uselessly—for even if I could I would not have done so. I was very proud, and you hurt me very much. I have changed, and that has made me think that you may have changed too, and that perhaps all may be different. We have made a mistake, Dan, I as well as you, and now I know it. I should not have been so resentful of your suspicions; you should not have been so angered by my resentment. You were older than I, and you should have been more patient. But I am not writing these lines to show you where you have failed, but rather to acknowledge my own errors. For, Dan, I did you a

wrong, though not in the way you accused me of doing it. I did deceive you, but it was not in the way you thought. I deceived you once, but even then I did not tell you a lie. I only let you go on thinking something that was not true. Cora died last night, here, with me by her bedside. It was not true, the news that came to us from that Eastern hospital; she was very ill, but she got well, and one day, more than a year and a half ago, she came to me, when we were living in Arapago, and begged me to be kind to her. I remembered what you had told me—recollect that you are a stern man—sometimes almost hard—that you have been hard even with me, though you never meant it—and I was afraid if I let you know, that you would not allow me to see her. And poor Cora, if anyone needed help in this world, such help as sympathy alone can give, it was she. She was never really bad, only weak—fearfully, fatally weak—and though God knows that I needed strength—that was one of the reasons I loved you, Dan, you made me feel so secure of myself—I could aid her. Under the name of Agnes Holcombe, the name she had taken when she left her home, she lived in the city,

supporting herself with some little assistance from me. She could only come to the house—I could only see her—when you were away. Perhaps you will understand now what it was I was keeping from you. I felt that I must see her if she was to be saved. I was the only influence for good that there was near her—I alone had power to control her, and I did see her and kept the knowledge of it from you. There was a young man who was in love with her—I did not know that for some time—she did not tell me, and though I did what I could, she insisted upon seeing him, slipping out to meet him, even in the garden beside the house. Poor girl, it seemed as if she craved love more than most of us, and that it was her very need for affection that always brought her trouble.

"I did not think that I would ever try to justify myself. At the time of our trouble I felt too deeply your unworthy doubts; the very fact that I loved you so much made the wound deeper, and I imagined then that I never could forget. But time does so much, and as the day has once more come around that has meant so much to us—is so nearly here, I have seen things differently, and I have wanted you to hear the truth. I do not



know what effect it will have upon you, but at least there will no longer be any misunderstanding, and whatever the future may be for us, it will not be the result of a mistake.

"I am—no, I have some pride left and I will not tell you where I am—if you really wish to see me, you can find me. But, Dan, if you are coming, do not wait long. I cannot bear suspense. If you are coming, come at once, and make this for me what I could not expect, and perhaps do not deserve, indeed a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

"MABEL."

As Irby finished reading the letter the sun started up from behind a not distant hill and flung its light full into the engine window; then its brilliant rays spread across the small sparkling waves of the grandly rolling river and fell on the opposite shore, turning the snow-covered hills a warm and delicate pink. The smoke, rising from the many chimneys of a village through which the train dashed, mounted slowly and almost in unswerving lines in the still air, while the unshuttered windows of the houses cast back the new radiance of the morning, flash on flash. It

seemed a new world, and to Irby it was one. Silently he handed the paper he had just read to Spurlock, who took it wonderingly, and again his head sank upon his left hand, which hardly had left the bar that controlled the on-rushing engine.

# A MATTER OF FACT



## A MATTER OF FACT

“Ah ! sure within him and without,  
Could his dark wisdom find it out,  
There must be answer to his doubt.”

—*The Two Voices.*

THE cool, dim library was very pleasant on this prematurely warm and glowing morning. There, the light seemed but to give tone to a tissue of shadows ; the atmosphere was velvety.

It was only May, and yet a day of midsummer. Through the closed blinds, lapsed, at times, slow, subdued puffs of air, soft with the dull, caressing warmth of July. The street below—the library was in the second story of the big, massive house—was overlaid with a glare of metallic light. The rumble—the mumble of the carriages and carts as they rolled along the pavement of this the most aristocratic part of the city’s Fifth and the world’s first Avenue ; the occasional cries of the small merchants of

the sidewalk ; the drone of a hand-organ, in which seemed drowsily to linger something of the lethargy of winter—one of those hand-organs that in our cities, as certainly as the dandelions, herald the approach of spring—these, and a hundred sounds in mingled indistinctness, fell, with slightly accented monotony, upon the ear.

Clearly it was time to think of leaving town. The crocuses had been out some time ; the “smells” would be soon in insurrection. Geoffrey Biddulph had begun to feel the rising pulse of such slight impatience as was peculiar to him—impatience more for change, after all, than for other circumstances. Of course, he decided, as he sat in his great arm-chair, he had gathered material enough to enable him to finish his monograph, “Beaumarchais and the American Revolution.” Philbrook, his private secretary, who had filled volumes with facts and gossip, would of course go with him—and the sea-air of Newport would be far more inspiring than the breezes that wander on Murray Hill. He would be off at once. Eleanor, with her husband, could follow at her leisure.

Biddulph hardly had the appearance of an old man. His perfect dress modulated every-

thing from the severity of age into aspects more belonging to middle life. His hair was but slightly gray. The lines in his face were but few and fine. His eyes were bright. The afternoon glow still lit the dull ashiness of closing day in his complexion. Was the invalid's air a thing of mere languid habitude or was it real? Whatever it was, however, he had lived for years in the full luxury of an invalid's enjoyment in the study of his own sensations; with the invalid's defence against intrusion; with the invalid's immunity which enabled him to make his life wholly his own.

An elderly man, consciously, almost conscientiously deferential, noiselessly entered the room.

"Mrs. Armroyd, sir"—there was the preface of an introductory, a slightly deprecatory cough—"has sent to inquire if you could see her this morning."

"Certainly," said Biddulph, with calm graciousness, "at any time—you may say at any time."

The servant disappeared. In his manner he could have taught a ghost repose; in his action, ease.

Biddulph sighed impatiently. One hand,

smooth, delicate, lay on the arm of his chair. He picked up the book open upon his knee, glanced at a line or two, and laid it down. "Armroyd," he repeated slowly, as if studying something latent in the two syllables. Even the strenuous name had never pleased him. To his delicate ear, it had always seemed too resonant, too clangorous, too suggestive of "self-help" and powerful machinery—things for which he certainly could not be expected to care. And that Eleanor, his only child, with all her possibilities; with the Biddulph name as an inheritance, and a great fortune in expectancy, should have fallen in love with this man, and afterward, with a firmness which he never had suspected in her, should have insisted upon marrying him—these were psychological mysteries too difficult for him to master. But she had never been a perfect Biddulph. She was small in stature, dark, gentle, timid, while the most of the race had been tall, light, confident, perhaps a trifle too assertive. She might be the heiress of the Biddulph millions; she certainly had inherited none of the Biddulph beauty. Hers was merely an elusive prettiness—a prettiness, however, singularly significant and peculiarly personal.



The door opened and Eleanor Armroyd—she looked like a young girl—came slowly, almost shyly, into the room. She was very slight; her cheeks were tinged with the warm blood of youth; her eyes were clear and bright; her soft, dark hair was gathered in a lustrous knot at her neck. Dressed with the rare perfection of a woman who knows herself not beautiful, but who, with faultless taste and all means at her command, strives to make the most of herself, she was a dainty vision in the rich, sombre apartment.

“This is very kind of you, Eleanor,” said Biddulph, “very kind of you to come and see me.”

“But, papa,” she said, in slightly reproving tone, “you know that I come every day—every day for a talk with you.”

“That is what I mean; it is kind of you to come every day. You bring the outside world to me, and now that I cannot go to the outside world I find I cannot get on without it. I always did take a not unworthy interest in my kind.”

“But I see very few people—you know I am not at all a gay person myself.”

“You can tell me something, and I like gos-

sip. My dear, no man is so profound that he can afford altogether to despise it. The gossip of yesterday is often the history of to-morrow. Really a great part of history has been at some time only gossip. What was once the idle talk of the agora or of the forum, is our history to-day, as the chatter of our club smoking-rooms will be history for those who come after us. Do not let us despise a rumor that posterity may respect. It is not courteous to our descendants."

His light, facile, satirical laugh followed as he looked fondly across the large, book-bestrewn library table at his daughter.

"I wonder," he went on, "how many of them really remember me—how many will be surprised to find, when the newspapers announce my death—there must be a column at least—that I only died the day before."

Eleanor stepped to her father's chair and dropped on her knees beside it, her big brown eyes—eyes of the sort in which it seems tears are ever ready to start—dimmed and suffused.

"Please," she implored; "please."

"I don't grieve," said Biddulph, kindly, "and why should you? I have had as much

out of life as I deserve—more than many men more deserving ; and if I must finally be resolved into my original elements—I forget what they exactly are—mostly, I believe, phosphate of something and water—that which happens to me has happened to others who had more to give up than I.”

“And don’t you really believe that there is anything else?” asked the girl, looking fondly up. “Do you really think that this is the end?”

“Nellie,” said Biddulph, kindly, and laying his hand upon her head, “why think of these things? You are young, with a long, happy life before you.”

“But,” cried Eleanor, “if it is so—if there is nothing more—if we are never to meet each other again—it is awful.”

“Why is it awful?” said Biddulph, smoothing her hair. “If we are sure that it is so, should it not make us care more for each other while we are here? should it not prevent us from weakening what we have here in hope of a remote future? No, my dear, the vague dreams of unestablished faith must be given up. As that great thinker, August Comte, has explained beyond question, in his doctrine of

‘The Three Stages,’ we have advanced beyond such delusions and should know that what we know is all.”

“But,” said Eleanor, almost shivering, “it makes all so lonely, so barren. I had rather believe, even if belief should be wrong.”

“What real good,” continued Biddulph, “can ever come of error? What facts can justify such vague belief? And, Nellie, there is nothing, nothing but facts, that we can trust; nothing but facts that can convince the modern mind. Do we believe anything here on mere conjecture; and can we build a heaven, an eternity of life, upon such foundation? Who would ask me to believe that there is something—some condition of things most important to me—which facts do not prove and of which I am ignorant? And is it not even more absurd to ask me to believe that there is something beyond this life which neither sense nor reason recognizes?”

“And mamma,” murmured Eleanor, bowing her head, “and the baby?”

Biddulph rose impatiently and now tottered with slow, vacillating steps toward the great carved mantel, against which he leaned heavily. Invalid or not, there was now no affectation,

no mere mannerism in look, or gesture, or action.

"Nellie," he said, sharply, "you must not indulge in such morbid thoughts. They are not worthy of you as my daughter. In your youth I so taught you that now, when you are a woman, you should not be startled when you meet truth face to face—when facts which cannot be gainsaid are brought to your notice."

Eleanor had not risen, but, with her head bowed upon the arm of the chair, wept silently.

"Father," she sobbed, "when I was a child I believed all that you told me. Then mamma died—then my baby. I do not believe that my mother lived only to pass utterly away. I do not believe that I bore my child only that she should wholly perish. I am an ignorant girl; but I have no need of reason. I know and I believe."

"I think, Nellie," said Biddulph, slowly, "that I understand you less and less every day. Really it is very perplexing—and annoying."

"I am very sorry, papa," said Eleanor. "I would be glad to be what you want me to be; I would have liked to have done what you

wanted me to do. But it has been impossible. I think I was nearly everything—did nearly everything that you desired—until I met Stephen.”

“I know—I know,” he said, a little petulantly. “You seemed bewitched—tradition, training, all seemed to go for nothing.”

“I loved him,” said Eleanor, simply, looking at Biddulph with something in her air which, if not defiance, was more than mere assertion.

“Exactly,” said Biddulph, a little impatiently. “You loved him; and in saying that you think you offer an explanation. But who will explain love? Your explanation does not explain. You answer a riddle with an enigma—substitute a mystery for a puzzle. You forgot yourself and your position. The strongest of all influences, habit and association, were as nothing. You did what I did not desire, because one day you met a certain man. With the fortune you will have, with your name, there were many whom the world, as well as I, considered much more eligible—who would have been glad to marry you, who wished to marry you, but you would not look at them or listen to them.”

"He loved me," answered Eleanor.

"Loved you!" exclaimed Biddulph, with rising impatience. "How do you know that he loved you more than any of the others? He had more to gain than they, and yet you believed him, and thought all the others fortune-hunters."

"You cannot tell how you know those things—you feel them."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Biddulph, almost scornfully. "He was a good-looking fellow and he took your fancy, as the fancy of many another rich girl has been taken by a handsome face, a manly air, a ready tongue, and a resolute spirit. Don't you suppose he thought of your money exactly as did the rest?"

"I—do you want to make me doubt him?" moaned Eleanor. "I wanted so to think he cared for me, that I could not help doing what I did. And now, if I thought he only married me because he thought I would be rich, I should die."

"You were not a reigning beauty, nor one to arrest attention in the world," continued Biddulph, "but it may not have been altogether for the '*beaux yeux de ma cassette*.' Let us

hope so. I think you never sufficiently realized your position, or else you never cared enough about it. Still, I never expected all to end as it did."

"But we have been so happy."

"I must confess," said Biddulph, "that the result has been better than I expected. I really cannot find fault with the man you insisted upon having for a husband. Stephen Armroyd has done wonderfully well considering who and what he was—a man from the masses, self-made and self-educated."

"But he had made himself even then," said Eleanor, proudly. "He needed nobody's money, nobody's aid to accomplish that."

"He had," conceded Biddulph, "attained a very respectable position. But what I desired for you was a man of brilliant rank, rich, your equal."

"My equal!" exclaimed Eleanor, scornfully. "As if Stephen——"

"Yes," interrupted Biddulph, "I know—we've discussed all this before—did it thoroughly when you were about to be married. There is no need to go over it again. I have quite often listened to the enumeration of Armroyd's qualities—intelligent, capable, honest,



of excellent presence and presentable manner—altogether a very admirable person.”

“If you could only do him justice.”

“But,” continued Biddulph, “really, a man who had only then made some little money by the invention of a clever machine; a man whom you met by accident—for he had no recognized position in your world—who was about as much out of place there as a white bear would be in Sahara. No, he was not one whom I had been led to expect you would marry, or whom I would care to have for a son-in-law.”

“Has he not always been perfect with you?”

“Personally,” said Biddulph, “I do not complain. He has borne himself with a deference and delicacy truly remarkable considering what must have been his early—disadvantages. I have no reason to say anything. I do not say anything. I am satisfied if you are happy.”

“And I am,” she answered, “I am; you do not know how happy.”

“I suppose,” said Biddulph, losing something of his habitual half-raillery that so easily changed to querulousness, “this is all I really ask, but we seem to have such different ideas of happiness. I had imagined I could give you something better; but you did not want any-

thing better ; you wanted Armroyd, and what one wants is so often so much better than the best, that I suppose I have been wise in letting you have him. Whatever else one may do, one can never be happy in another's way. I may have been weakly indulgent, as I always have been, and have given him to you as, at another age, I would have given you any costly plaything. I have known many women and have learned something of their ways. Never oppose them. Let them go to the devil, or his equivalent, in their own way, and they will bear you no grudge. Obstruct them but with a straw, and they will hate you, for they will not doubt that they would have enjoyed, but for the straw, that supreme, that final happiness that every woman seems continually and feverishly to seek. Instinctively I acted toward you as toward any other woman—knowing that you are all alike—for all women are the same ; only the conditions that are required to make them so are really ever different.”

“But, papa, are you not contented now? has it not all been for the best?”

Biddulph did not at once reply.

“If your mother had lived,” he said, in a moment, “she would have wished you to do as

you have done. That thought influenced me. It has always seemed to me that you were like her, really more her child than mine, and I thought she would understand what was best for you much better than I could hope to do. I loved her dearly, but I am afraid that I sometimes made her—not quite happy—not as happy as she might have been. I felt that I did not fully understand her, and it was the fear that I might not understand you—might inflict upon you some grief that I could not fully comprehend—that made me finally give my consent.”

“Yes,” said Eleanor, gently.

“Yes,” continued Biddulph, “she — your mother — could believe — well — in short, believed, and my incredulity, my scepticism, was always a trouble to her. At the last,” Biddulph paused and passed his hand across his forehead, “at the last, when I knew that she was dying, then I first realized the barrenness of disbelief. How happy they must be who can trust in the hereafter! How comparatively bearable would have been even that separation, if I could have thought that we would ever meet again! But,” Biddulph’s voice broke, for a minute he could not speak, and when he did,

it was with the weak tremulousness of fore-running age, in the shaking, time-worn articulation of senility which was not yet his, "since then," he continued, more composedly, "I have never been the same. But I could make you happy, and in yielding to your every wish I sought to make some atonement to her. And I gave up more than you know. If Armroyd was not positively repugnant to me, there could be no sympathy between us. The slight tentacles that nature puts forth in first distrust, brought to each knowledge of the unlikeness of himself to the other. But time has so softened our relations that, whatever I may be to him, I am glad that we more than bear with each other. He knew that you were all that was left to me, and has not insisted upon taking you wholly from me. I am grateful to him that he has consented to live in my house, something another might not have been willing to do—and I do not misinterpret his reason. He did not, I am convinced, wish to separate us utterly; but then he must, of course, have realized that you were both largely dependent upon me."

Eleanor's face burned with a quick, indignant flush; she with difficulty withheld

the words that evidently pressed for utterance.

"Of course it was a great advance," continued Biddulph, in the same vein—"a wonderful piece of good fortune for him, and he should have been grateful. He had the good sense also to recognize my sacrifice—his inequality——"

"Papa!" exclaimed Eleanor, facing her father with eyes blazing through unshed tears, "I will not bear it, I will not have you say such things. Stephen is more than my equal. He is good, wise, noble, brave, strong, and—so handsome."

"Yes, yes," said Biddulph, indulgently.

"You do not know him," continued Eleanor, "you do not understand him. You have lived in your assumed superiority, you have made it impossible for him to reach you. His position has not been an easy one. You say he has been perfect with you. He has been as perfect with everyone, about everything. Think how splendidly he has always treated that Mr. Runyon."

An unwonted look of stern severity came into Biddulph's face, and Eleanor paused for a moment.

"You know very well," she continued, more calmly, "that Runyon never really did anything for him. The money he lent him to advance his invention, Stephen could have got anywhere. Still, when the machine was successful, Stephen paid Runyon over and over again. He has helped him in trouble after trouble, and Runyon is always in trouble. It was only yesterday that Stephen first refused any one of his demands, and then only because it was so outrageous."

"Runyon has been to see him again, has he?" half sneered Biddulph, visibly annoyed, however, by what he heard.

"Yes," said Eleanor. "I didn't mean to tell you, but I forgot. I knew it would trouble you. Runyon has been here once more. And after all Stephen has done for him, too."

"What did he want?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," answered Eleanor, "and when Stephen refused, Runyon was angry and insolent, and said he would bring a suit against him."

"And your husband?" asked Biddulph.

"Told Runyon," replied Eleanor, "that the threat confirmed his refusal."

"Nothing can be done?"

"Stephen prefers to endure the annoyance of the suit. There is nothing, he says, of the claim."

"Nothing of the claim!" exclaimed Biddulph, excitedly. "But there is, in one sense. Do you think that it is nothing that a suit will be brought against your husband, my son-in-law, for money claimed to have been lent, advanced—whatever it is called—to aid him in something about a machine," and he scornfully, spitefully accented the word, "a machine making, I believe, more cheaply something greatly superior to anything of the kind that could be produced before? Do you know what the world will say? It will say that Armroyd has robbed Runyon. And there will be talk and newspaper articles. Probably my name—your name—will be brought into the affair in some way."

"What would it matter?"

"A great deal," answered Biddulph, impatiently. "It would not be pleasant—it would not be endurable. In a business sense the affair may be wholly justifiable, but—I know nothing about business and I don't like it." He paused a moment, then he added: "I suppose that if the man got the twenty-five

thousand dollars, even that would not be the last of it."

"Yes," answered Eleanor, positively, "Runyon would sign papers, do something that would end everything. I wanted Stephen to give him the money, but he would not. He said that it was not right to suffer such an imposition; as a matter of business principle he could not allow it."

"Business!" said Biddulph, in a tone too well bred perhaps to be a sneer, but still wonderfully suggestive of one. "Business! Are there not other considerations—that my name should be kept from common scandal? that his own name even should be kept from easy defamation?"

"I am sure," said Eleanor, "that Stephen would never do anything that would be unworthy of your name or his own."

"I do not know," said Biddulph; "I have seen something of these practical business men and—their ways are not my ways. Armroyd might do what he thought right according to his lights; but"—Biddulph shook his head—"he has no traditions, no inherited instincts to guide him."

The servant re-entered the room.



"Mr. Tollison has called and says he desires to see you, sir," he announced, standing like some stiff but very life-like figure that had been rolled in upon well-oiled wheels, and left in that particular spot.

"Yes," said Biddulph, "and yet I did not send for him."

"Shall I go?" asked Eleanor.

"For a moment," answered Biddulph. "I do not know what Tollison may want, and he may find it difficult to state his business with you here. He is an excellent man of affairs—has managed the estate for me admirably all these years—but he is hardly at his ease in the presence of a lady."

Biddulph had scarcely time, after Eleanor had left the room, to take a turn or two, as he did, with doubtful and wavering steps across the library, when the servant again appeared and announced :

"Mr. Tollison."

A small, neatly dressed man came uncertainly forward and nervously took the hand that Biddulph condescendingly held out to him.

"Ah, Tollison," said Biddulph, "I am very glad to see you; indeed I may say that your

coming has been most opportune. But first, about what do you wish to speak to me ? ”

“ Nothing in particular, nothing,” answered Tollison, with his handkerchief at his heated forehead. “ But you told me to call from time to time, and——”

“ I believe I did. Sit down, Tollison,” said Biddulph to the still standing man. “ But really I cannot imagine why. You know I have perfect confidence in you ; that I understand very little about the transaction of affairs, and that the property was very fortunately left to me in such condition that it has always been very easy to manage it.”

“ Yes,” answered Tollison.

“ And I luckily have been so placed—inheriting from my father a fortune so wisely invested and a man of business in every way so capable as you—that I have not been obliged to give money matters even a thought. You cut the coupons, I spend the proceeds, that has been about all that has been necessary ; and I think our respective tasks have been quite congenial to both of us—for I have observed, Tollison, that it has always been a certain satisfaction to you, the mere handling of money, while the only pleasure I

have ever had in it has been the getting rid of it."

Tollison laughed as one who feels that a laugh is expected, but still uncertainly, as if fearful that what he was doing might not be quite right.

"But I said your coming was opportune," said Biddulph. "If you had not come, I should have been obliged to send for you. There is a certain little matter to which I desire that you should attend at once."

"Certainly, Mr. Biddulph."

"The fact is that I want some money for a particular purpose."

"Yes," said Tollison, again becoming monosyllabic and speaking as if his only thought was to avoid any possibility of discussion.

"It's a largish sum, but of course there will be no difficulty about your letting me have it—well—to-morrow morning."

"No," answered Tollison, but there was more of hesitation than of certainty in his tone.

"I want twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" repeated Tollison, perceptibly startled.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," said Biddulph, sharply, "a mere trifle—an amount that,

with my fortune invested as it is, you can easily raise in an hour."

"But——" began Tollison.

"To-morrow morning will do," said Biddulph, rather peremptorily. "I shall not want the money before then."

"But——" again began Tollison, sitting on the very edge of his chair, "the purpose—if I might know why you want this sum—this large sum of money."

"Tollison, my good friend," said Biddulph, suppressing his annoyance, "it has never been my custom to consult you about the disposition of my money, and I do not see any reason for doing so now. Indeed, I may say that I consider what you have said ill-timed and extremely unsuitable."

"Still, Mr. Biddulph," insisted the little man, in pitiable agitation, "if I should venture to inquire——"

"What!" exclaimed Biddulph, in unrestrained anger, "am I not to do what I please with my own? We have known each other a long time, Mr. Tollison, and I must say you have served me faithfully and well, but do not, I pray, forget yourself, Mr. Tollison. I cannot, even in view of the many years you have

been in my employ—the employ of my family—permit you to inquire into my motives or question my actions.”

“But I must know, Mr. Biddulph,” said Tollison, in an agony of embarrassment. “You have never asked for so large a sum before, and I must ask you to tell me, or else——”

“Or else?” interrupted Biddulph, in astonishment. “What do you mean—that otherwise you cannot get it?”

“I do not know,” answered Tollison, so confused that he evidently had lost all self-control. “Only tell me,” he went on, beseechingly, “and I will see that it is all arranged.”

“There is something here that I do not understand,” insisted Biddulph with great severity, looking squarely at the almost trembling man before him. “Am I to believe that it is necessary for you to know what disposition I intend to make of the money before you can procure it? You cannot mean to imply that, for it would be absurd.”

“You said you have always trusted me, Mr. Biddulph,” begged Tollison; “trust me in this. I am not good at concealments, and if you will only not question me, you will find that it will be all right.”

Biddulph seated himself in front of the now thoroughly excited man, with great deliberation and with something of a judicial air.

"Tollison," he said, "there is some mystery here. I intend to know what it is. As you say, you are not skilful in subterfuge, and you had best tell me at once."

"I beg that you will ask me nothing—for your own sake and for the sake of others."

"I direct you to raise for me a certain sum of money which, although large, is not enormous," continued Biddulph, utterly disregarding these entreaties, "and you insist upon my telling you what I am going to do with it, implying that if you do not know this, the thing cannot be accomplished."

"Not exactly that," groaned Tollison.

"That, at least, was the impression I gathered from your words," continued Biddulph, pitilessly, "and I must conclude that it was a just one. If the knowledge of my purpose is all that is necessary in order to effect the procurement of this sum, then there cannot be any real lack of power to raise the money."

"No," Tollison hastened to respond.

"The money will be forthcoming from somewhere," asserted Biddulph.

“Yes.”

“But still there is something unexplained. You cannot assure me truthfully, on your word as an honest man, that I can have what I wish without revealing to you my intention?”

Biddulph, looking narrowly with his sharp, old worldly eyes at Tollison, saw that a tremendous struggle agitated him.

“No,” answered Tollison, at length.

“Ah! that is very well. Now we shall soon understand. It must be, then, that there is some one else concerned in this affair.”

“Mr. Biddulph,” cried Tollison, in utter dismay, “you really must ask me nothing more.”

“There is some one else concerned, and I am not entire master of my own affairs. How can that have happened? Through no fault of yours, Mr. Tollison, I am sure——”

“No, Mr. Biddulph,” said Tollison, proudly; “everyone has conceded that. All that could be done I did, and when——” he paused now in even greater consternation than before, having evidently said more than he had intended.

“Something has happened,” said Biddulph, quite pleasantly, “and from the connection, it has something to do with my money matters?”

He waited for an answer, looking at Tollison with a fixedness that finally led the latter to hesitatingly murmur :

“ Yes.”

“ Now, from the fact,” continued Biddulph, relentlessly, “ that you hesitate about complying with my demand, I must argue that it is something unpleasant. There is some difficulty that you have kept from me? ”

“ Yes, and—no,” stammered Tollison.

“ As you will readily understand, it is of the utmost importance to me to find out what it is. If, with my fortune, I cannot at once raise so insignificant a sum as twenty-five thousand dollars, the situation must be very serious.”

Tollison was silent.

“ This is a matter that will admit of no trifling,” went on Biddulph, and his manner, which had been apparently easy and almost indifferent, suddenly became stern and impressive. “ Misfortune has happened, and the fact has been withheld from me, as it could easily be, from one who has given no more attention to details than I have.”

“ Yes,” gasped Tollison ; “ but really it is nothing ; ” then using the phrase he had employed before, “ it will be all right.”



“You must allow me to think otherwise, Tollison,” said Biddulph, quietly. “From your manner I see that it is more serious than I had anticipated. Is it ruin?”

“Do not ask me,” cried Tollison, “I can say nothing—I——”

“It is ruin,” said Biddulph, without the alteration of a tone or the variation of an inflection. “But why have I not been told?”

“It is not my fault. I advised it. I argued that it should be done.”

“Then I am to infer that what I should have known—knowledge of my own affairs—has been kept from me by you through the influence of others—or another?”

“Mrs. Armroyd, sir, and Mr. Armroyd——”

“They desired that I should remain in ignorance of my loss?” quietly demanded Biddulph.

“They thought it was best—that you might be saved trouble—that, as it would make no difference——”

“Not make any difference?”

“No—you see, Mr. Armroyd has made such a large fortune in the last three years—that everything—could be carried on just the same.”

“And it has been his money that has maintained this establishment—that has enabled it to go on as it has—that has given me what I have had?”

“Yes,” continued Tollison, now utterly demoralized, “since you lost all.”

“All?” repeated Biddulph.

“Yes, sir, all. They thought—for they realized how proud you are—that you would be happier if you did not know, and so they forced me into helping them in the deception—and we have succeeded, although now——”

“And I have been mistaken about everything all these years?”

“Yes.”

“And I am to understand that I have been living all this time on the bounty of Mr. Armroyd, my son-in-law?”

“Not exactly that. Of course I’m sure Mr. Armroyd never looked at it in that way.”

“That I am a pauper dependent upon others?”

“No—no!” cried Tollison, appalled at the effect of his revelations. “You do not see—let me explain.”

“My good sir,” said Biddulph, with his stateliest air, “I must ask you to withdraw for

a short time ; I wish to speak a few moments with my daughter, alone."

As Eleanor entered the room she saw something unusual had happened.

"Oh !" she cried, running to Biddulph and putting her arms about him. "What is it ?"

Biddulph sat like one who, just recovering consciousness, has not yet reached full realization of his situation. As he did not at once answer she asked again, with even greater evidence of apprehension :

"What is it ?"

"I have learned the truth."

"Mr. Tollison—— ?"

"Tollison has told me all."

"And he promised us that you should never know," grieved Eleanor.

"I hardly think that he is really to blame," continued Biddulph, quietly ; "I pressed him pretty hard, and he is not a person of great presence of mind or strength of resistance."

"But you will not think of it again ? You will forget you ever knew or heard of it ?" besought Eleanor.

"I do not know what to say or what to think. I am stunned, prostrated. The shock

has been very great, and I cannot tell how it will affect me."

"But we did it for the best," she moaned. "We wished to spare you all we could. We knew you would feel the loss deeply, and Stephen——"

"Yes."

"When I proposed that we should try and keep you in ignorance, Stephen at once assented. I knew how you felt about him, and I was afraid you might think of him mistakenly. Remember you are a very proud man——"

"And you did this to spare my pride?"

"We did it because there was no real reason why we should do otherwise. What you lost is little in comparison with what Stephen has gained—what he will gain. You do not know about him—he is one of the rich men of the city—of the country—a power—an influence. Within the last few years he has been successful in all he has undertaken, and everyone respects and honors him. You, living as you have, cut off from the world, have heard nothing of this. Father, you must say that you were wrong, and that I was right. You must say it."

"Perhaps," answered Biddulph, sadly. "You

must give me time to collect my thoughts. One cannot suddenly find the fabric of his life rent and ruined, and remain unmoved; one cannot discover that the idea of his whole existence has been utterly mistaken, and instantly command every faculty."

"But there is no reason why you should feel it—everything will—must go on as it always has," urged Eleanor, eagerly.

"I don't know—I don't know," murmured Biddulph, weakly and perplexedly. "I do not seem to have quite my accustomed vigor."

Indeed, he seemed to have aged with strange suddenness—a paleness overspread his face—there was a tremulousness in his long, lean hand never there before, and his glance was for the moment wandering and objectless.

"There can be no change—everything is the same—except some miserable money."

"But I am penniless—a pauper."

"You are not. Do you think that Stephen was without pride and that it was not hard for him, comparatively without fortune, as he then was, to marry me—the heiress? You must now forget your pride as much as he did then—understanding that it is a joy to him to find himself in a position to benefit you—to benefit us."

"I do not seem very clear in my mind, Nellie," said Biddulph, continuing what he had said before rather than responding to her last speech. "It seems as if in some way my faculties had been benumbed by this blow. I am an old man," he paused, irresolutely, "I have been proud and imperious, and self-confident. Perhaps this is retribution."

But he did not appear to be really as much moved by the revelation to which he had just listened as Eleanor might have imagined that he would be; either the callousness of age or a certain indifference which he himself would never have suspected, seemed to enable him to endure so well the overthrow of so much that he had considered assured.

"You did it for the best," he went on, pitifully, "you and he—but still I should have liked to know."

Eleanor looked at him curiously and then hastened to speak:

"And now everything shall be as it was, only you will understand Stephen better, and all—everything will be clear."

Biddulph slowly bowed his head with something of an inattentive air.

"Will you send Tollison away? I don't

think I care to see him again to-day. I am hardly equal to talking about business."

"Of course," answered Eleanor, leaning over him and kissing him upon the brow as he sat bent in his chair. "And now let me make you comfortable."

She brought a footstool and placed it before him—then she arranged the cushions for him to lean against.

"Now you are all right," she said, standing off and contemplating her work.

"Yes," he replied, listlessly.

She was going, when he stopped her.

"I should like," he said, "to see your—to see Stephen Armroyd. You will tell him so for me, and he will come?"

"Yes."

"I have been mistaken," he said slowly, "but there was nothing to lead me to suspect that I was. It seemed so clear to me that I knew all that I needed to know, and so impossible that there could be anything else." Then he added, returning to his former careless, courtly manner, and speaking with his habitual lightness—as it were shrugging aside annoyance with the graceful ease of which he had always been master—"Before you go could

you give me a book? Spinoza's "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus." You'll find it on the third shelf at the right of the door. I wish to verify a quotation."

As Eleanor handed him the volume he spoke again.

"Spinoza perhaps did not see with the complete clearness of some; still his conclusions are always interesting. Facts to him were perhaps not the paramount and only things they should always be. But his was a marvelous intellect—a charming personality. Thank you. And do not forget that I should like to speak with your husband. I can manage to see him at almost any time."



## A FRESH-WATER ROMANCE



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## I.

THE Lone Star was the oldest propeller of standard class "on the Lakes." It was twenty years or more since the blocks were knocked from under her at the Cleveland shipyard where she had been built, and she slid down the ways, her starboard side striking the water first and a great wave rising as she struck, that foamed across the basin and broke high upon an opposite pier. During this score of years she had run between Buffalo and Chicago, touching sometimes, but not always, at Cleveland, at Detroit, at Milwaukee, with a regularity so great that it was now her greatest if not her only merit.

Once the Star—that soon had become her name in common usage—had been the pride of her owners, the boast of her home-port. She was shown to "visiting statesmen" when

it was desired to impress them with the importance of the "Commerce of the Lakes;" she was mentioned in swelling editorials whenever the local newspapers descanted upon that theme. Her speed, her tonnage, her power, her build, were subjects of frequent eulogy. She was a practical wonder; a marvel of naval architecture. But now all was different. She was no longer visited by committees. She was no longer mentioned in print except in some such brief announcements as: "Detroit—Passed up, Lone Star, 11.20 P.M." "Buffalo—Arrived, Prop. L. Star, Stark-weather, wheat and flour. Stoke & Pogis." Other propellers had been built—others upon better lines, of greater speed and power—others in whose holds could be stowed thousands more bushels of the beaded amber of the billowy Minnesota wheat-fields, thousands more feet of the yellow Michigan lumber, and tons and tons more of the tawny copper of true aboriginal hue, taken from the Lake Superior mines. But the Star held steadily to her original trade; had grown old, evidently old, in it. Even the new coat of paint given her every spring did not hide that unpleasant fact. There were dents and patches and cracks which

paint could not entirely cover or caulking quite conceal. And if advanced years did not make her appear wholly shabby or dilapidated they did not give her picturesqueness. She was only a "Lake propeller," with nothing of that charm of association which gathers around her far-away kindred of the ocean. She stirred no thoughts of distant lands ; of

" The Indian winds,  
That blow off from the coast, and cheer the sailor  
With the sweet savor of their spices ; "

of many climates ; of strange peoples ; of monsters with uncommon names ; of drifting icebergs ; of all that adventure, that poetry, that romance have given to ships, even in their fallen estate, that have sought wider seas. Her very form would have killed imagination. She was broad of beam. Her bows were bluff. Fancy could liken her to nothing known to poetry, unless, perhaps, to the blunt-headed grasshopper. She was not unlike that insect in build, for her high arches rose above her hull like the insect's legs above its folded, sheathing wings. Still she was as admirably adapted for the purposes for which she was intended as are most of our American productions, even if she was as frankly and fearlessly

ugly a thing as we Americans alone dare make or use when we have a distinct and practical end in view—as ugly as an elevator, an elevated railroad, the advertisement of the last patent medicine, a new political theory.

There was probably only one person who ever thought the Lone Star beautiful—Nettie Starkweather, the daughter and only child of the captain—of Captain Samuel Starkweather, who “brought out” the boat and had been her captain ever since. And why should she not? She was a Lake girl, born and bred in the big city which owed its origin and early growth to the Lakes, and had never seen anything different. Besides, there was one proud day in her very young life, always vividly remembered. Had she not, an insignificant mite of a thing, but upon that great day, far from unimportant or inconspicuous in her stiff-starched white dress and broad, blue sash—had she not christened the boat when it was launched, and, hardly realizing what she did, but knowing that it was something very important, had she not broken the bottle over the boat’s bow and seen the bright, foaming wine run slowly along the rail? And then she had been brought up with the boat, so to speak, and to it she owed

much. For not only had her father had his pay as captain for so many years, but he had come to own a sixteenth interest in her, and had always had that share in her net earnings besides. Therefore to the old propeller they owed not only their living but all they had, even the ring upon her small finger, the chain around her slender neck, and the watch her father had given her at Christmas.

But now there was a new interest to Nettie Starkweather in the old propeller. That very morning her father had told her that if David Sackett received his license as chief mate—and there was no doubt that he would—that “Dave” was to go mate of the *Star*—he went second on her last season—that is if he, Starkweather, and about this there seemed to be a suspicion of doubt, was to be her captain. Of course Nettie was interested in this, and—but it is quite impossible to dis sever and distribute in parts of speech the thoughts, the fancies that mingled in the reverie of the girl as she sat silent on the lower veranda step stirring with her foot the gravel in the walk before her—thoughts and fancies so vague, so disconnected, so novel, that she herself scarcely recognized even that they were delightful.

All at once she laughed a little, in that sudden, mysterious way in which happy young girls will laugh, as if from the very superabundance of their joyousness; and then she looked hastily up at a young man who sat perilously near the edge of the platform, watching the little foot as it scattered the pebbles.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I don't know why I laughed," she answered, quickly; "I just had to."

The young man was about to speak when Starkweather came out through the front door.

"I thought I heard you," he said, as he walked with heavy tread to a chair, "and I—" he paused for a moment and beamed placidly upon the pair—"didn't wait for you to come in—was afraid you'd think I was busy and stay out."

And then he laboriously sat down. Nettie gave a pebble larger than the rest a quick, impatient push; a sudden look of disappointment shot across the young man's face.

"Mild for the season—ain't it?" the Captain said, turning to the young man.

"Yes, sir," he answered, meekly. "They told me down at the office——"

"Stoke & Pogis's?" asked Starkweather.



"Yes, sir, that they'd heard the ice was almost out of the Straits."

"No!" said Starkweather. "When'd they get word?"

"This afternoon," replied the young man.

"Navigation'll be open right away," said Starkweather, rather eagerly. "No more cribbage for us; don't think of any more cribbage this year. Cribbage is well enough for a winter evenin', and I won't say I don't like it. Night shut down, soft coal in the grate, a storm outside, a pipe, Nettie playing on the piano, and cribbage ain't at all bad. Eh? What? But—?" pausing a moment—"that ain't the openin' of navigation."

"Miss Nettie," said the young man, taking advantage of Starkweather's pause, "I tried to get that song you told me about. I went to every music-store in the city, but they didn't have it."

"I'm sure, Mr. Sackett," said the girl, "you needn't have taken that trouble. You don't mean to say you remembered the name?"

"As if I would be likely to forget it," said Sackett, with lowered voice. "'When the Stars come one by one, Love.' They've sent for it. It'll be here to-morrow."

"Mr. Sackett!"

"And there's such a difference in seasons," continued Starkweather, blandly. "Along about '78—must have been along there—it was the season she"—Captain Starkweather hardly ever mentioned the propeller's name—"came near bein' 'bliged to winter in Chicago—there came the blamedest season—ice wasn't no name for it—why, she didn't get out o' here, Sackett, for three weeks after what she'll do now."

"No?" said Sackett, absently.

"Emily Marvin's to be married next week," said the girl, a little impatiently, "and I'm to be bridesmaid."

"Are you?" asked Sackett, rather anxiously. "If—if—we aren't out of port by that time, can—would you mind—will you let me go to the church—to see you?"

"I! The idea!" half exclaimed the girl. "I keep you from church! It'll do you good. It must be an age since you've been in one."

"When I walked home with you——" began the young man.

"But you weren't at church then. You only happened to see me in the porch where I was waiting for father, who had gone back for his

spectacles he had left in the big prayer-book. You only happened"—the slightest accent—she couldn't help it, on the word—"along that way and came into the porch, not a step further."

"‘Happened,’" said the young man. "There's a good deal in this world that 'happens' on purpose."

"I don't think it'll amount to a thing—not a thing," said Starkweather, partially to himself, "'specially as it's now so late in the season; but they're keepin' up the talk that I'm to be retired."

"Who says so?" asked Sackett, indignantly.

"Oh, them that pretend to know. As if a man who won't be sixty-three till December, wasn't in the prime o' life. Why, Sackett, you know I've sailed these Lakes forty-five years—I've told you that often. 'Failin' faculties!' Between you an' me and the pawl-bitt, Sackett, there's fools down on them docks that can't be beat—as fools. 'Failin' faculties!'" The Captain paused in utter indignation.

"I've heard nothing about it," said Sackett, confidently.

"An' wouldn't be likely to," went on Stark-

weather. "But there's those that bring me the news straight enough. I s'pose some one wants my place. He'll have a good time gettin' it, whoever he is," and Starkweather brought down his fist on the arm of his chair with a thud that almost startled himself.

"Emily has lots of presents," said the girl. "I gave her the loveliest looking-glass you ever saw."

"Did you look into it to see?" asked Sackett.

"Nonsense!" said the girl.

"There's been more or less talk about this for a year or two," continued Starkweather; "but there seems more substance to it this spring."

"Who's at the bottom of it?" asked Sackett, a little alarmed at the boldness of his last speech, and running for protection under the lee, as he might say, of a word or two with the Captain.

"I think it's Jacox," said Starkweather.

"Jacox?" asked Sackett. "What has he got—what can he have—against you?"

"There's them," said the Captain, impressively, "that seem to think you're doin' 'em harm by livin'. They feel you see through 'em,

and they don't like it. Jacox is one of that sort. He can't bear the sight of me because I know him. They feel streaks of meanness, that kind, just as I feel shoots of rheumatism—in the winter," he added, cautiously, "only in the winter—to speak of."

Starkweather settled silently back into his chair, and again Sackett took heart.

"You'll be getting out the flowers in the garden soon, Miss Nettie?" he asked.

"Yes, the beds ought to be dug right away."

"There's a new kind of border I saw in Detroit last summer, and I was thinking——"

"They say it's goin' to be the best season the Lakes have had in many a year," interrupted Starkweather. "Elevators full at Chicago. Lots of coal to go up. Freights'll just be boomin'."

"I hope so," said Sackett, a little impatiently.

"You saw a border in Detroit——" suggested Nettie, decidedly.

"But the Lakes are not what they used to be," continued Starkweather; "freights nowadays ain't nowhere. It's them railroads that do it."

"That fill the elevators in Chicago, that burn

the coal, that——” began Sackett, innocently, and stopping suddenly as the Captain turned and looked sharply at him.

“No,” said the Captain, severely. “They kill freights; don’t they carry all winter? They don’t have seasons of navigation. Have we ever had any such freights as we used to have before they got to runnin’ the way they do? What did the Lord create the Lakes for if it wasn’t to travel by?—to carry cargoes on? I say railroads go against nature. They ought to be put down by act of Congress.”

Sackett rose determinedly as the Captain paused.

“What are you doin’?” asked Starkweather, in some surprise.

“I think,” said Sackett, desperately, “I must be going.”

“Already!” said the Captain, “Why, I came out here for a good, long talk.”

“I think I must go,” maintained Sackett.

“All right, if you must,” replied the Captain. “Come and see us again; drop in any time. Always glad to see you. Good-evenin’.”

“Good-evening, sir.”

Sackett shook hands despondently with Nettie, who had also arisen.

"Come again soon," said the girl, gently.

"I will," said Sackett. "I'll bring the song right away."

Nettie stood looking at him until she heard the latch of the gate click, and saw him turn down the street.

"Well," she said to her father, as she sat down and resting her chin on her hand gazed into the darkness, "I hope you enjoyed yourself."

"I think," said the Captain, "David Sackett's a very smart young man. He seems to set value by what I say to him. But it's curious that sometimes, when we've got an evenin' all before us, and I'm just warmin' to a subject I know all about, it's 'Good-evenin',' and off he goes. It's curious, it really is."

He shook his head slowly, and, rising, went into the house, there perhaps to reflect on the unaccountable conduct of this otherwise ordinary young man, leaving his daughter to her own unuttered thoughts, as she sat out upon the veranda and watched the stars "come one by one."

## II.

It was a very quiet, rather out-of-the-way part of the city, although it lay near its heart. The bustling "docks" were not far off; great factories were near; only a couple of blocks away began the shop-bordered and principal street where the main line of the street-cars ran, where the great hotels stood, where omnibuses, carriages, wagons, carts, rumbled and rattled from early morning till late at night, and where at least half the population, it seemed, within that time passed up and down. In this comparatively deserted quarter grass grew in the cracks in the sidewalks and along the curbstones in many places. There were even scattered trees in the streets, some of them thriving and with spreading branches; others but the dry skeletons of what they had been.

The mild spring evening was just closing in, and the stars were just beginning to show, like



saffron-drops on the dark violet sky, as Sackett walked along Hyphen Street toward Starkweather's house, which stood well toward the uptown border of this part of the city. The neighborhood itself was still; the bell of a locomotive running along a street three blocks off, even if it did not have a pastoral tinkle, was not at all unmusical. Only that, and now and then the quick whistle of a tug in the harbor, or the deep-throated roar of a propeller as she rounded in from the Lake, broke the silence. The time, the place, were conducive to reverie, and there was plenty in Sackett's head and heart to furnish material for that pastime. He was not given to introspection. He took his psychological conditions very much as a more sophisticated and more complex person might take the warmth of sudden sunshine or the coolness of an up-springing breeze. But a man cannot help but think when he is troubled, eager, anxious, in love—for moments perhaps over-bold, for minutes sunk in fear.

And Sackett thought, as he walked unconscious almost of where he was going, but still with a decided persistence in one direction, of what he only was; thought of Nettie and of all she was; reflected upon their differing con-

ditions, and, in the lucid and usual manner of lovers in such strait, fancied how different things would be if they were only—otherwise. Not that he was not a fellow of pluck and resource. But he was quite overcome with his own audacity in dreaming in such way of the daughter of the Captain of the Lone Star and the owner of one-sixteenth of that boat—he, whose father had been, at most, a wheelman on the old brig “James and Jane,” and who had died at thirty, leaving his mother and him in poverty—he, who in his boyhood had “taken to the Lakes” that he might aid in fighting the want he knew so well, and who had learned what little books had taught him only at the city’s winter schools and in the scant hours in the dim forecastle. Why, the thing was ridiculous. What would Nettie herself think of such presumption? Hadn’t he better stop right where he was—give up the little unreasonable hope that now whispered to him to persevere—turn the other way and walk down Hyphen Street instead of up it? But he had such an excellent excuse for going to see her to-night—was ever lover without one?—for he had the song, in a roll, in his hand. What was the harm of going on? Undoubtedly he would

find the Captain at home. But suppose Starkweather did run on about "good years" and "bad years" on the Lakes, and condemned, right and left, new things as troublesome to peace and prosperity; still could he not watch Nettie sitting quietly in the twilight; and—really, it wasn't worth while to turn back after he had walked so far. And so he held on his way, a disturbed, doubtful, downhearted, yet—for was there not that little, rather impertinent, whispering hope?—a far from despairing and a decidedly eager young man.

As he came near the house he could see that Nettie was sitting alone on the veranda.

He opened the gate absently, but briskly made his way up the walk. Perhaps he might have a word with her before the Captain appeared. She did not rise to greet him, and he stood with his arms on the railing.

"Father's gone out," she said.

His heart sank, then gave a great leap, then stood still.

"Gone out?" he repeated.

"Yes, gone up to see Mr. Stoke at his house," she said. "He is troubled about what he has heard about his not being captain. It's nonsense, I tell him. I know it's nonsense."

"Of course it is," said Sackett.

"But he says," continued Nettie, "that if he oughtn't to be captain any longer—oughtn't to be trusted with the boat and valuable cargoes—he oughtn't; and so he has made a matter of conscience of it, and he has gone to have a long talk with Mr. Stoke—you know Stoke & Pogis own her, except," this with a little pride, "our share—and tell him all he thinks, and," she had not failed to see the roll he held in his hand, "is that the music? Do come up and sit down. I'd like to look at it. Father'll be in soon."

He mounted the two or three steps and stood leaning against one of the supporting posts of the veranda. She took the song, opened it, and said, quickly :

"Oh, how good of you! I thank you so much. Let's go in and try it right away." But she did not stir, and neither did he move from where he was.

"Won't you come?" she asked, still not moving.

He did not reply, and for a moment they stood silently looking at each other.

Now was his time. But where was his courage? And where were the words, the phrases,

that he had conned and studied—the words in which should mingle expression of humility, fear, ardor, hope, devotion, courage, love as true as any the world had ever known? Gone, lost in a bewildering, vanishing haze. He did not speak for a moment.

“There’s something,” he said, at last, “I’d like to say to you, Miss Nettie. May I?”

“Me! Why not?” she said, looking up at him with that perfect air of surprised curiosity that a woman can best assume when she knows exactly what she may expect.

“I know you won’t like it,” he said. “Not that it’s anything a fellow shouldn’t say, or a girl shouldn’t be willing to hear, for that matter. I’ve tried to say it for a long time—not that there’s any reason why I should say it—or that I expect it to lead to anything——”

“But what is it?” she asked, as he paused as if to gather and choose his words. You don’t know how interested I am.”

“Are you?” he asked, looking at her earnestly and steadily, and leaning a little forward so that she shrank back, as one might who had raised a spirit mightier than it was supposed the simple spell could evoke.

“I have got my mate’s certificate. There it

is," and he pulled it from his pocket, "and I want to tell you how much I owe you—and him—and—to thank you—and to—" and he paused in actual anguish. There was a pitiful, pleading look in his eyes—a rhetoric beyond all eloquence of speech.

"I don't think," she said, slowly, with eyes a little downcast, "that you are telling me much. I thought——" and she, too, paused.

"You thought?" he asked, eagerly.

"I thought," she said, "that you were—going to say something—that—don't thank me—you've nothing to thank me for," and she took the certificate from his hand and held it listlessly and without looking at it: "Not a thing—I thought you were going to say something that meant something—a great deal——"

"It is a great deal that I want to say," he replied, excitedly, "a great deal to me—if I dared—if I only dared," and he paused again.

"What," she said, looking up at him quickly, and for the smallest fraction of an instant, in which it is possible for a girl to look a dozen things at once, her voice sinking a little in spite of valorous effort that it should hold its own, "are you afraid of?"

"You."

"Of me! Am I so frightful?"

"Nettie," and as he drew near to her she did not draw away. "Nettie," and he drew nearer to her, and still she did not stir. "Nettie, will you let me say it?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"It's all right," shouted Starkweather from the gate. "I'm a fool," he cried, as he stormed up the walk, "a downright fool. Pack up a bag for me, I'm off for a lunatic asylum. It was only some of that dock talk. Why Stoke'd never heard of such a thing, never'd thought of such a thing; and Pogis said—Oh, you're not alone."

He brought up at the foot of the steps and gazed with a puzzled expression at the pair before him, for even to his eyes it was evident that something unusual had happened.

"No, Captain Starkweather," said Sackett, firmly, "I'm here and I want to see you."

"Sorry to have missed your call," said the Captain, genially; "but you're not goin' yet. Sit down for a while."

"You don't exactly understand me; I've something important to say to you."

"Oh, you have, have you," said Stark-

weather, blankly, and evidently at a loss how to act.

"You've got to know it some time, and I don't see why you shouldn't know it now. I've asked Nettie to marry me, and she has said that she would."

"No?" And the Captain sank into a chair.

"I know I'm poor and she is rich, that I'm nobody and she's somebody; but I'm not always going to be that, and if she'll wait, and she says she will——"

"And you say—think this all right?" said the old man, looking at the girl.

"I think it is the best thing in all the world," she answered, proudly, "and if he hadn't asked me I should have asked him, and I'm not sure but I did."

"It's rather sudden," said Starkweather, doubtfully, "and I don't exactly know——"

"I do," said the girl, "and it isn't sudden. It seems as if it had been always. And you don't mind?" she added, beseechingly.

"I don't know," repeated her father, helplessly.

"Dave isn't rich, but he will be some day, and now he's mate the Lone Star 'll take care of all of us. You were poor—poorer than he



—when you and mother were married, you've told me, and why should it make any difference with us?"

"I don't know as I've any real objection if you haven't," said Starkweather, slowly. "I suppose I ought to have more worldly views, but I haven't. I haven't had many views but your happiness, and if you say it must be, why, I s'pose it must."

"It must," commanded the girl, authoritatively.

"Well," continued the old man, "then we'd better call it concluded and be done with it. There's my hand," he said, turning to Sackett; "I like your principles and I don't mind your prospects, and I guess you'll make her happy if you can."

"I'll try," answered the young man, simply.

Starkweather glanced at the two, neither of whom sat down, and there seemed something almost questioning in his look and attitude.

"I guess," he said, at length, "I'll just step inside for a moment."

Somewhat later, when Nettie entered the house, she found her father smoking vigorously, and evidently pondering upon some subject deeply. She had kissed him good-night, and

was leaving the room before he spoke. When he did, it was with something of an air of abstraction, with the manner of one who has only succeeded in convincing himself of an astounding fact after mature deliberation. He rested the hand that held his pipe upon his knee and rubbed the other slowly over his chin; the words came slowly, as if even now he were not quite ready to commit himself to an open avowal of what on further reflection might appear to him different.

“Do you know, Nettie, I don’t half believe that young fellow used to come to see me after all.”

She had kissed him once, but returning she threw her arms wildly around his neck, hugging him to her, and kissing him a score of times.

### III.

WHEN Sackett came on watch at one o'clock in the morning, the Lone Star, bound from Buffalo to Chicago, was on Lake Erie, about forty miles to the southward and eastward of Pointe Pelée Island. The wind was strong from W.S.W. and was increasing. A considerable sea had risen. The night was clear. The stars, seen through the wind-swept space, shone brightly and seemed strangely near. Now and then a scouting cloud started above the horizon and advanced swiftly. On either hand, and even ahead, could be seen the green and red signal lights of sail vessels—the lights of some grain-laden fleet “bound down” from Chicago. They had the wind free, and as one of them passed swiftly, and not far away, it could be seen that she was carrying all sail. Sackett ordered the man, far forward on the promenade deck, to keep a sharp lookout, and he himself mounted to the hurricane deck and stood in front of the pilot-house. There were two men at the wheel.

He glanced in at the compass. The propeller was on her course, N.W. by N.  $\frac{3}{4}$  N. She ran along, and as signal lights farther up the lake were visible, he thought of "checking down" his vessel, but he did not.

Now the clouds came on in skirmishing squads. The wind shifted three points—to W. by N. The sea was rising; it was vexed by the changing wind. Vigilant as Sackett was, with the acquired and ever-present vigilance of a true sailor when on duty—with sight and hearing keenly if unconsciously alert—he really could not keep his thoughts from wandering. Was not the prosperous season drawing to a close, and was not the time—the coming Christmas—not far away, when Nettie and he were to become "shipmates" for the voyage around the world of their joint lives? and——

"Green light on the port bow," sung out the lookout, "close aboard."

With a glance Sackett saw it. It flashed quickly into plain sight, not many lengths away—not four points off the Star's port bow.

"Starboard—hard a starboard!" shouted Sackett.

"Starboard," answered a man at the wheel, and the Star swung to port. It was rather a

close thing ; but the big "fore-and-after," now showing a torchlight, rushed at almost a ten-knot speed across the bows of the propeller, and the propeller passed safely under the stern of the sail vessel.

Sackett glanced at his signal lights. They were all right.

"That vessel must have changed her course," he thought ; "why, what fool could guess? Her jibs must have hid her red light or we would have seen it before? She couldn't have kept a good lookout."

The propeller, back on her course, held steadily on at her usual speed. All lights to be seen were now distant and broad off either bow. There were none ahead.

How beautiful Nettie had looked as he hurried away, not an hour before the propeller started on this trip. Even though the wind was still increasing he could see that the clouds had thickened and were in closer array to the northward and westward ; all was safe, and he could not but think of her as he now stood gazing ahead. Unconsciously he pictured to himself the room in which he generally saw her—its comfortable look—its home look—to which she added so much and—the door opening into

the dining-room was at the end of the piano, against which she leaned for a moment. How many panels had that door? There certainly were two at the top. But were there two at the bottom? He could not tell. This puzzled him. And——

One of the deck-hands had come from aft out on the promenade deck. Sackett seemed to hesitate for a moment as he looked at him.

“Come up here,” he said to him.

The man mounted to the “hurricane roof” and stood silent. He was an old man whom Dave had known a long time. When Sackett first shipped, as a “boy,” on the “Yellowstone,” the Englishman was deck-hand on the steamer, and as deck-hand the man had “followed the Lakes” ever since. Drink had been his curse and had kept him down.

Sackett glanced ahead and looked around.

“What do you think of it, Mason?” he asked.

“Looks like a nasty night, sir,” said Mason, an old salt-water sailor. “And,” he added, contemptuously, “there’s no sea-room on these puddles.”

There was a rumble amid the distant clouds. At last they seemed to march in battalions and

with regulated step. The wind had died away a little.

"It will be nothing," said Sackett, "I'll wait awhile. He hasn't had half a dozen hours sleep in the last forty-eight. And he'll want to take her up the river. But—stay where you are, Mason."

"Yes, sir," said Mason, and he turned and stood looking off to windward.

The wind fell away more and more. There was not a signal light in sight.

Sackett stood gazing steadily ahead, absently, as one who did not know him or his kind might have supposed. How wonderful—so ran his disjointed thoughts—it all was. Wonderful that she, the spoiled child of the prosperous Captain and owner of a sixteenth of the *Star*, should have placed the soft hand that so many had sought in his hard palm. Like many another good fellow—like all good fellows, who never quite get over the idea that a pretty woman is a being above and beyond earth, sacred, and, if loved, to be loved with the feeling that consecrates its object—like all good fellows in such cases, he felt that Nettie was to be tenderly adored and carefully guarded, or otherwise she would spread her wings

and take flight to the native region in which she could only be at home. That she even could think of him seemed a sort of divine condescension that filled him with ineffable gratitude; that she said that she loved him amazed him with a sort of dazed ecstasy that he could neither analyze nor find words to express. And then her money! It was both a shame and a delight to him; a shame that he, who had nothing but his chief mate's license, should receive so much from her; a delight—because it must prove that she loved him when, against all self-interest, she gave so much to one so poor. But in this thought there was much that was inspiring. Here was something that a man might accomplish. He swore gently to himself that he would own the Star—all except the sixteenth—before some indefinite, not far-away time. He would save money. He would make money. He would own a half-dozen propellers better than the Star. He would——

The heavens flashed and crashed. Its artillery was at last wheeled into action. The roar and flame were incessant. The rain fell in almost compact mass. It beat down the crests of the mounting sea, threshed them out as flails



thresh out and flatten unbound sheaves. But the long roll of the waves swept along. It was now blowing more than "half a gale of wind."

"Steady on your course," shouted Sackett to the men at the wheel. "Mason, call the Captain. Send another man forward. Come back here yourself."

Mason was down the ladder in an instant. In a minute he was on the deck again—the Captain and he.

"How's she heading?" asked the Captain, as he looked forward and off either bow.

"Northwest by north, three-quarters north, sir," replied Sackett.

"Keep her there."

"Shall we sound the whistle?" asked Sackett.

"There's no fog," said the Captain.

"Lights can't be seen far, sir."

"Sound it," said the Captain; "it can do no harm."

"Sound the whistle," said Sackett to Mason, and its first warning was soon heard.

"What's her speed?" asked the Captain.

"About seven miles," said Sackett.

"Check her down still more, but give her good steerage way."

Sackett gave the order to the engineer through the "bells." He could soon tell that the boat was "slowed down."

Two men now were forward on the promenade-deck, "in the eyes of her," one port, the other starboard.

All were silent, waiting, watching, listening. There was the booming thunder, the splintering lightning, the roar of the whistle every minute, the hissing of the trampling rain, the sound of the wind, sharp, as sweeping along the decks it was cut by the standing rigging.

"I've lost my nerve this trip," said Starkweather to Sackett. "Perhaps I'm really not fit for duty," he added, solemnly. "Nothing must happen—nothing this season. I'd be ruined. They'd say I was to blame."

"Nothing," began Sackett——

"Bright light—and red and green close on the port bow," yelled one of the men forward.

The words were scarcely spoken when the three lights burst into plain view.

"Back her," shouted Starkweather. "Back her strong."

Sackett signalled the engineer to stop—the engine must not "catch on the centre"—then instantly to back. The order was immediately

obeyed. The Star was "backing," "backing strong," when a huge, dominating mass, about four points off the port bow, seemed to rise out of, to detach itself from, the darkness and the obscuring rain. At full speed apparently, a large, heavily laden propeller came down upon the Star. The crash was terrific. The Star was struck just abaft her forward port gangway. The force of the blow swung her bow to starboard. The standing rigging gave way; running rigging parted; the Star's mast fell. The stranger evidently had ported just before the collision. This lessened the force of the blow a little. As it was, her sharp bow cut into the Star's side almost to her midship line. The engine of the stranger was now "backing." The Star was "backing" when struck. The vessels quickly drew away and lost each other in the darkness.

For a minute all was confusion on the Star. The lookouts rushed aft; the engineer had stopped his engine and hastened up; the "watch below" hurried on deck.

The Star lost her headway, "fell off," and was soon rolling in the trough of the sea.

"Go below," said the Captain to Sackett; "and see how bad she's hurt."

Sackett swung himself off the hurricane deck. He ran aft. He could see that the port side was crushed in; he could hear the water pouring into the hold. He knew that nothing could be done—that the *Star* must sink. He hurried back; he could not see the Captain. The men had rushed to the two boats hanging at the davits. The second mate headed those about to lower the starboard boat; Mason was with the others, and stopped for a moment and held on to his rope, even after it began to run through the block.

“Lower away,” shouted some one to Mason; “there’s a hole in her bigger’n a house.”

“Quick,” yelled the second mate, “if you ever want to see daylight again.”

All discipline, for the moment at least, was really lost. Sackett saw this as he reached the hurricane deck.

The clamor of voices ceased. Above the swash of the waves, above the swish of the rain along the deck, above all the tumult of the storm, Sackett could hear the shout of the Captain as he stood between the boats on either side:

“Stop! Hold on everything!”

In an instant Sackett was by his side.

Starkweather stood with a revolver in his hand, and as he turned from port to starboard, he shouted to the men at either boat :

“Leave the ship, would you ! A pack of cowards ! I’ll shoot the first man that stirs to lower a boat.”

“Captain Starkweather,” said the second mate, “we’d stand by you and the Star as long as any living men, but it’s no use. She’s bound to sink.”

“Bound to sink !” shouted Starkweather. “She mustn’t sink. She shan’t sink.”

“We’ll do what we can, or we’ll sink with her,” said Mason, resolutely, taking a turn of the rope he held around a belaying-pin. “I don’t want no better mourner’n the old Star at my funeral.” He looked around, and as he saw Sackett he gave the rope another and quicker turn.

For an instant nothing was said. The power of command was arrayed against the determination of men who knew that in the boats lay safety.

“They’re right, sir,” said Sackett. “She’ll sink in a few minutes.”

“You !” shouted the Captain, turning fiercely upon Sackett—“you ! I’m captain of this boat—I’ll——”

A heavy wave struck the port side. The vessel rolled to starboard. She righted with a sudden jerk. The men clung to the ropes and to the rails on either side. Starkweather was thrown to the deck, his head striking heavily. Sackett staggered but did not fall. Instantly he was beside the Captain, and sought to aid him. But Starkweather did not stir. Sackett and Mason lifted him to his feet.

The Captain was powerless and unconscious.

"The old man"—the captain of a vessel, no matter how young, is always "the old man" to his crew—"shan't go down if all the rest do," said Mason.

Together they carried Starkweather to the vessel's side.

"Lively now," shouted Sackett. "Get clear of her before she sinks."

Mason rose up to take an oar. The boat rolled. He was jerked overboard. A wave swept the boat away from the vessel. Mason snatched at a rope trailing over the propeller's side. It seemed to render slowly, as if through some block above. He tried to climb it hand over hand—to keep his head above water.

"Good-by, Dave," he shouted to Sackett, as

if they were still man and boy on the Yellowstone. "It's no use."

The rope fell over the side. The propeller lurched to port, pitched, and went down. The struggling boat half filled, but did not sink.

"Back! We may save him yet," shouted Sackett.

They rowed back. They lay upon their oars. With every flash of the lightning they strained their eyes to see what they might see. They shouted. They heard nothing but the rumble of the thunder, the wash of the waves. The old deck-hand and the oldest propeller on the Lakes had gone down together.

#### IV.

THE winter was severe. The Lake was covered with ice. Hundreds were busy upon it, sawing it out in large blocks. These were loaded upon sleds which strong horses dragged slowly around the light-house to the city, where it was stowed in huge ice-houses. Fishermen, through holes cut in the ice, plied a craft, a "gentle craft," of which old Walton never dreamed. You could see them coming, going, away out upon the ice in the dull winter light. The snow lay thick everywhere—on wharves, on the great bulky elevators, even on the vessels moored for the winter in the harbor. Only occasionally could a living thing be discovered on any of them. The docks were deserted. The silence there was seldom broken, and then only by slight sounds which appeared to come from far away like echoes. Where there is human neighborhood and the sense of human presence, there is no place within city bounds where, it seems, at times,



that desolation is so complete, as the harbor and wharves of a winter-bound port upon the great Lakes.

Up at the Starkweather cottage the rigid season held sway with equal rigor. As Nettie sat looking out of the window this afternoon, she could see the leafless tops of the bushes in the yard in stalky stiffness above the snow. The branches of the lilac-tree were encased in frozen sleet; the small evergreens were weighted with ice. The gravel walk lay as if its pebbles were embedded in hardened cement.

It was a sad house. There was the sense that there might be other calamity impending and imminent, even where calamity had lately struck so suddenly and so heavily. In his room lay Starkweather, senseless, ever since he fell upon the deck of the Lone Star. He might never be better. But there was one relief, he knew nothing of what had happened; another, that he did not suffer pain. These things the doctors said, and these things were good.

Sackett stood silently behind Nettie as she sat looking out.

"And last year it was all so different," she said, as she looked sadly up at him.

"Perhaps," he replied, with at least some

show of confidence, "next year—or it may be sooner—it will all be as different in another way."

"Then," went on the girl, disregarding what he said, "father was well and strong, and she—the Star—hadn't sunk, and there wasn't the lawsuit; and"—and with a girl's capricious wilfulness, taking a strange delight in affecting to taste a bitterness which she knows does not exist—"and you loved me."

"Nettie!" half-exclaimed the young man.

"I don't know," she was answering his tone, not his speech, for she knew well enough what he would have said had he said more. "Everything else has changed so much. And the money—the lawsuit——"

"Nettie," he said, and he held his hands under her chin and looked over into her upturned eyes, "let the lawsuit do its worst; your money has made me feel awkward and ashamed many a time. Lose it, and you will be like many another girl, only you won't—won't be like any one in all the world."

She laughed contentedly in the way that women will, when what they have sought to have said is said in exactly the right way and as they expected it would be.

"But father——"

"When is it to be?" he asked in a moment.

"At eleven o'clock to-morrow. But do you really think it will be successful?" she asked, anxiously.

Sackett did not answer.

"Even if it is," she continued, "they say that he will think and feel as he used to do."

"Yes."

"And he'll know that the boat is gone, and then he'll feel—you know how he felt last spring—he'll think that he is disgraced. Then there's the lawsuit. It will be awful."

"It will be hard."

"But there's no other way?"

"None. I must go, Nettie. I shall come again this evening."

Now, at noon, the operation was nearly ended.

All the time Nettie had been in the room.

"I will hear his first word," she had said, for the doctors had told her that as soon as the pressure upon the brain was relieved it would instantly resume its normal functions.

She had not spoken, scarcely moved; the

look of determination in her face was one of resolved despair. Sackett stood beside her. His expression changed often. He was a man, and had a man's revulsion from a sick-room. He had not a woman's courage in such place—a woman's blessed adaptation to all such scenes of visible suffering. He could not bear the sight of the glistening, torturing instruments upon the table. There was a large bowl half filled with water, and over its edge hung a blood-stained towel, the deeper color fading off into a dull yellow, and the sight sickened him.

But few words were spoken. The physicians understood each other's every act. Little now remained to be done.

"It will be a success," said Doctor Mayne, at last, confidently.

Nettie would have fallen had not Sackett sustained her. Her tears came—there had been none before. The arid sands of sorrow drank them up, and now there was gladness.

"My dear young lady," said Doctor Mayne, "stand here. Let him see and know you first."

"Leave the ship!" said Starkweather, faintly. "I'll shoot the first man that stirs."

Then she took her father's hand and smiled.

"Why, Nettie," said Starkweather, "is there—is there something the matter?"

"Yes, father," she said, kneeling on a low stool by his side; "you are not well. You must let me take care of you until you are."

"Take care of me!" he murmured, with just strength enough to show a little impatience; and then in a lower voice, as if to himself, "bright light, and red and green. Why didn't she hear us? Why didn't she port? Why didn't she stop and back?"

"He must not be excited," said Doctor Mayne, "nor made tired, nor yet allowed to puzzle and wonder."

"Father," said Nettie, "when people are sick they are often delirious, you know. You'll be all well again soon."

For a moment the Captain did not speak. "If—if it had been real," said Starkweather, "and we'd lost the boat, I'd never have held up my head again."

"He doesn't know that the Star is gone," she whispered to Sackett, who bent down to listen when she beckoned to him.

"And God help him," Sackett said, "he never shall."

The wedding did not take place till the middle of the next spring. Then the doctors said that Starkweather was as well as he ever would be; then the lawsuit had been decided, and the future of Nettie and Sackett lay before them. It was not a particularly brilliant future, for the lawsuit had been lost and all except the house had gone, and the Captain, though he did not know it, never would be in command again; but they were not unhappy.

The wedding was a quiet one. It took place in the room where the Captain sat day after day. There were but few present. There was no wedding-trip, of course. That, they said, would come some other time.

And all through the season there was a mystery in the house—not a very terrible mystery, but one which all assisted in maintaining. For the Captain, the Lone Star made her trips as regularly as usual, and marvellous trips they were, or you would think so if you heard the talk between the Captain and Nettie and Sackett. There was a little harmless suppression, a little evasion here and there, and certain newspapers were kept carefully away from the old Captain. And the most of what was said was true, except that the Lone Star was not

the old boat at all, but one entirely new of which Sackett was the master.

Nettie is sitting reading silently. Sackett is busy at the table. He is looking at the drawing of a new propeller-wheel, in which Starkweather and he have great faith. Starkweather himself is watching the dancing blaze of a soft coal fire in the grate.

"If it had been real," he says, half to himself, "if she had been lost, I should have gone down with her—I couldn't have lived disgraced."

Neither of the others heed him. They have heard it so often before.

Then Nettie reads aloud from the book of "The Pilgrim's Progress, from this World to That which is to Come," and Sackett lays down the drawing, and Starkweather turns half around and looks at her as she reads :

"Now, as they were going along, and talking, they espied a boy feeding his father's sheep. The boy was in very mean cloaths, but of a very fresh and well-favored countenance; and as he sat by himself, he sung. 'Hark,' said Mr. *Great-heart*, 'to what the Shepherd's boy saith;' so they hearkened, and he said :—

‘ He that is down, needs fear no Fall ;  
He that is low, no Pride :  
He that is humble, ever shall  
Have God to be his Guide.

‘ I am content with what I have,  
Little be it or much :  
And, Lord, Contentment still I crave,  
Because thou savest such.

‘ Fulness to such, a Burden is,  
That go on Pilgrimage :  
Here little, and hereafter Bliss,  
Is best from Age to Age.’

“ Then said their Guide, ‘ Do you hear him ?  
I will dare to say, that this boy lives a merrier  
life, and wears more of that herb called *Heart’s-*  
*ease* in his bosom, than he that is clad in silk  
and velvet.’ ”



THE END OF THE BEGIN-  
NING



# THE END OF THE BEGINNING

A FANTASY

"CITY OF NEW YORK.

"April 10, 1887.

"DEAR SIR: It is with some hesitation that I venture to trespass upon your valuable time, knowing as I do that the demands of clients, of constituents, of friends, are so exacting. Still, as what I am about to ask relates to a matter lying very near my heart, I hope you will forgive me. A young man in whom, in spite of the usual extravagances and follies of youth, I discern some promise and whom I hope, for his own sake and from my friendship for his excellent father, dead long ago, to see occupying a respectable position in the community, has, with the heed-

lessness peculiar to his age, involved himself in certain difficulties which, although at present of a sufficiently distressing nature, may, I hope, be satisfactorily overcome. Knowing so well your distinguished abilities, ripe judgment, and great experience, I can think of no one to whom I can, in this critical period of his life, more confidently send him for counsel, instruction, and aid, and I accordingly commend him to you, trusting to our old friendship to account for and excuse my somewhat unusual act. Though what I ask of you is something not usually required of a lawyer, I think you will understand my reason for thus troubling you. No one can have a more thorough knowledge of the world than an old practitioner like yourself, and what you may say must fall upon the ears of youth with weighty authority. Talk to him as you would to your son, if you had one, not as a client, and I shall be inexpressibly indebted to you, for I know you will lead him to appreciate the serious realities of life, which, at present, he is so disposed to disregard.

“I need only add that he is a young man of some fortune and, certainly, by birth worthy of much consideration. He will call upon you in

person and himself explain his present embarrassments.

“I remain, now as always,  
Your obedient servant,  
RICHARD BEVINGTON.

“THE HON. JACOB MASKELYNE,  
Counsellor-at-law,  
Number — William Street,  
City of New York.”

This was the letter that the Honorable Jacob Maskelyne read, reread, and read yet again. Indeed, not content with its repeated perusal, he turned it this way and that, looked at it upsidedown, and finally, laying it upon the table, he held up its envelope in curious study, as people so often do when thus perplexed. It bore the common, dull-red-two-cent stamp and was post-marked the day before. Both it and the letter were apparently as much matters of the every-day world as a jostle on the side-walk. Nevertheless, the old lawyer was puzzled—more than puzzled, although he, of all men in the great, wide-awake city, would in popular opinion have been thought perhaps the very last to be thus at fault. If millstones were to be worn

as monacles—if there was any seeing what the future might bring forth—the chances of a project, the risks of rise or fall in a stock, the hazards of a corner in a staple, the prospects of a party or of a partisan, Jacob Maskelyne would be regarded as the man of men for the work. But, under the circumstances, even to him this letter was more than perplexing. Here, on this spring morning, with floods of well-authenticated sunshine pouring into every nook and corner, dissipating every mystery of shadow and, it might seem, every shadow of mystery—here, in his office, bricked in by the unimaginative octavos of the law—those hide-bound volumes, heavy literature of all things most amazingly matter of fact; here, in the eighteen hundred and eighty seventh year of the Christian era, in the one hundred and eleventh year of the Republic, he had received a letter from his old guardian, whom, when he himself was not more than twenty, he remembered, walking about, a feeble old man with many an almost Revolutionary peculiarity in speech and manner, and whose funeral he, with the heads and scions of most of the first families of the town, had attended full twenty-five years ago. It certainly was enough to bewil-

der any one. He again took up the letter. It was unquestionably in old Bevington's best style, courtly enough, but a trifle pompous. Had it not been for its true tone he would undoubtedly have thought the thing a hoax and immediately have dismissed it from his mind. He touched a hand-bell, and in response a young man—a very prosaic young man—over whose black clothes the gray of age had begun to gather, appeared.

"Bring me the letters received of the year eighteen sixty—letter B," said the lawyer, sharply.

That was the year in which his father's estate had been finally settled, and he knew that there would be many examples of his guardian's handwriting in the correspondence of that time.

The clerk soon returned with a tin case and laid it on the table. Mr. Maskelyne took one from among the many papers therein, and, striking it sharply against the arm of his chair, to scatter the dust that invests all things in the garment the outfitter Time warrants such a perfect fit, he spread it out beside the letter he had just read with such blank wonder.

"Identically the same," he muttered. "No other man ever made an *e* like that."

The clerk had vanished and the lawyer was again alone.

He glanced once more at the mysterious missive, and then, with the purposelessness of abstraction, he rose and went to the window. Nothing caught his eye but the sign-bedecked front of the opposite building and one small patch of blue sky—near, gritty, limestone fact and a far-away something without confine. Still, amazed as he was, the contagious joy of the time sensibly affected him.

The sparrows, quarrelsome gamins of the air, for the time reformed by honest labor into respectable artisans, upon an opposite entablature, in garrulous amity plied their small, nest-making joinery. The sunlight falling through a haze of wires, wrought into something bright with its own glow a tuft of grass which clumped its spears on the opposite frieze. Of even these small things and of much more Mr. Maskelyne was partially conscious. But the letter! Clear-sighted as he was, he knew but little—so forthright was his look, so fixed toward mere gain—of the wonderful country which lies beneath every man's nose, less even of the vanishing tracts which retrospection sometimes sees over either shoulder. But the letter! It peopled



his vision with things long gone. It brought into view old Bevington—"Dick Bevington," as he was called to the last day of his life—and a nickname at fifty indicates much of character—brought up before him Dick Bevington as he was before age had stiffened his easy but dignified carriage or taught his once polished but positive utterance to veer and haul in sudden change; brought up old Bevington, as he himself, in childhood, had seen him, stately but debonair, the perfection of aristocratic exclusiveness, affable, however, in the genial kindness of a kind-hearted man secure in every position—a genuine Knickerbocker in every practice and in every principle—a well-born, well-bred gentleman. And that once active and once ebullient life had long ago gone out! It almost seemed that such vitality, so held in self-contained management, so wisely put forth, so well invested, so to speak, should have lasted forever. But now there was nothing left to bring him to mind but a portrait in the rooms of the Historical Society, or a name in the list of directors when the history of some bank was given, or in the pamphlet in which the story of some charitable institution was told from the beginning—really there was nothing more than

this to recall Dick Bevington, foremost among the city's fathers, the leader of the *ton*. When he had last seen his guardian he had thought him of patriarchal age. And was not he himself now nearly as old? In spite of the blithesome aspects of the morning, Jacob Maskelyne turned away from the window with an unwonted weight at his heart and a new wrinkle on his brow. The whole world seemed to be going from him, losing charm and significance in a sort of blurring dissatisfaction, as upon a globe, when swiftly turned, lines of longitude and of latitude, and even continents and seas, vanish from sight, and all because his own life suddenly seemed but vexed nothingness. He had not even mellowed into age as had Bevington. He was as sharp and as rough-edged as an Indian's flint arrow-head, and he knew it.

He seated himself at his table. Automatically he was about to take up the first of several bundles of law-papers, when he was startled by the entrance of the clerk. He leaned back in his chair, and his reawakened wonder grew the more when a card was placed before him upon which was written, in a dashing hand, "From Mr. Bevington."

"A gentleman to see you," said the clerk.

“What does he look like?” asked Mr. Maskelyne, suspiciously.

“Nobody I ever saw before,” answered the clerk; “and he seems rather strange about his clothes,” the man added, in a rather doubtful, tentative manner.

“Let him come in,” said Mr. Maskelyne after a moment’s pause.

The door had hardly closed upon the vanishing messenger when it again swung upon its hinges, and a new figure stood in relief against the clearer light from without. In his eagerness to see of what nature a being so introduced might be, Mr. Maskelyne turned his chair completely around, and silently gazed at the new-comer as he entered. His eyes fell upon a slim, graceful young man dressed in the mode of at least forty-five years ago—a mode not without its own good tone undoubtedly, but with a tendency toward gorgeousness, which an exquisite of these days of assertive unobtrusiveness, might think almost vulgar. His whole attire was touched in every detail with that nameless something which really makes the consummate result unattainable by any not born to such excellence; but in the bright intelligence shining in his dark eyes, and

the clear intellectual lines of his face, even Maskelyne could see that if he had given much thought to his dress it was only from a proper self-respect, and not because dress was the ultimate or the best expression of what he was. Few could look into the luminous countenance and not feel a glow of sudden sympathy with the high aspirations, the pure disinterestedness, the clear intellect, that lit up and strengthened his features. Even the old lawyer, disciplined as he was by years of hard experience to disregard all such misleading impulses, felt his heart warm toward the young man.

"I hope that I do not intrude too greatly on your time," said the new-comer, with a smile so pleasant, so ingenuous, so confiding, that all Maskelyne's ideas of deception—had he had time to recognize them in the moment before a strange, unquestioning acquiescence took complete possession of him—were at once dissipated.

Won really in spite of himself by the appearance of his visitor, the famous counsellor waved his hand toward a chair.

"I suppose," continued the stranger, with an almost boyish sweetness, as he seated himself, "that Mr. Bevington has already told you why I am here."

Mr. Maskelyne might very well have answered that Mr. Bevington was hardly to be looked to for any information on any subject, but he did not—the wonderful circumstances of the interview had been so driven from his mind by the potent charm of the young man's personality.

"Mr."—and he paused as if waiting for enlightenment as to the name of the stranger.

"I'm in a devil of a scrape," continued the young man, apparently imagining that the letter had made all necessary explanations, and mentioning the devil as though he was an every-day acquaintance, a pleasant fellow whom he had just left at the door awaiting his return.

"Ah!" murmured the lawyer.

"I did not wish to see you," continued the other, his singularly trustful smile breaking again over lip and cheek.

"Indeed," said Maskelyne, his wits and perceptions in most confusing entanglement.

"No," went on the unaccountable visitor. "I supposed that you would give me what the world calls good advice. But I don't want that. I want to hear something better."

He laughed aloud in such a joyous, cheery fashion that the old lawyer even smiled.

"You don't think I am a good man to come to for bad advice?" he said.

"The last in the world. I don't suppose that you ever did a foolish thing in your life."

"And therefore am perhaps less competent to advise others who have," replied Maskelyne, half heedlessly, for his thoughts were slowly turning in a new direction. The more he looked, the more the eager, spirited face seemed familiar. He had certainly seen the young fellow before, but where? It seemed to him that he could certainly remember in a moment, if he only had time to think.

"Mr. Bevington——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Maskelyne, in a significant tone, "you said Mr. Bevington?"

"Certainly," said the stranger, suddenly looking up in evident surprise. "Didn't he write?"

"I have received a letter," said the old lawyer, cautiously.

He was on the point of making some further inquiries, but the impulse came to nothing. The former feeling of acquiescent but expectant apathy again possessed him; indeed, he had never been much in the habit of asking questions. He knew that he often learned

more than was suspected even, by letting people talk on in their own way.

"In the first place," and he paused a moment—"I am very much in debt." The young man spoke as he might of taking a cold, asleep in the open air—as if he had been exposed to debt and had caught it.

The first look of sadness rose and deepened over his face as he shook his head dejectedly.

"But I'll get over it."

"By your own exertions?" asked the lawyer dryly and evading the question.

"I write a little," replied the impenitent, modestly. "I have even heard of people who admired some of my verses."

"You have no other occupation?"

Old Maskelyne was asking enough questions now. Indeed, under the magic of the stranger's manner he had quite forgotten himself, his usual caution, and even the exceptional way in which his companion had been introduced to him.

"Yes," the other admitted, "I am a lawyer."

"Don't you think," said the older man answering almost instinctively, "that on the whole you might find the employments of the

law more remunerative than the calling of a—poet?”

“Mr. Maskelyne, I sometimes think that the world really believes in the sort of thing underlying your question. But there are gains you cannot invest in lands and stocks—columns with statues at the top as well as columns whose sums are at the bottom. Who will undertake to strike the balance between fame and fortune? What mathematician will undertake to say that  $x$ , the unknown quantity of fame, does not equal the dollar-mark?” Then he added, after a moment’s pause, “Mr. Maskelyne, don’t you think it is true that

“ ‘ One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name ’—

don’t you really?”

It was hard to resist such enthusiasm, such unquestioning certainty. The old lawyer did not even smile as he lay back in his chair, a new life shooting through every nerve, his gaze fixed on the flushing face of the young man.

“And the consciousness of best employing the best that is in you,” he continued. “Who dare shorten the reach or blunt the nicety of man’s wit, make purblind the imagination,



stiffen the cunning hand? Tell men that in some Indian sea, fathoms deep, lie hid forever Spanish galleons in which doubloons and moidores, as honey when it more than fills the comb, almost drip from the sacks, and you will see in their sudden thoughtfulness, how quickly they appreciate such loss; tell them, if you can, what, through poverty, erring endeavor, uncongenial occupation, the world, with each year, loses in intellectual riches, and they will stand heedless."

Speaking with the incomparable confidence of youth, its own glorious nonsense, the young man's voice sent old Maskelyne's blood hastening through his veins in almost audible pulsations.

"What if I do not wish great wealth," the speaker continued, "must I be made to have it? I want but little. Give me food, clothing, habitation, sufficient that my eyes may see the delights this world has to show, that my ears may catch the whispered harmonies of all things beautiful, gladden me with the radiance of common joy, and that's all I want. Are the worldly so insecure that, as the frightened kings sought to still beneath their tread the first throb of the French Revolution, they

must stamp out the first symptom of revolt against the almighty dollar ? ”

He paused, and glanced triumphantly at the old man. He felt in some secret, instinctive way that he was gaining ground. Fine sense was victorious for the moment over common sense. A squadron of fauns had charged from amid the vine-leaves, and the legion upon the highway was in rout.

“ I think,” said Maskelyne, at last, and with a strange, sad, patient air, unwearied, however, by the young man’s dithyrambic, sometimes almost incoherent, speech, “ I think I cannot attempt to advise you. Having discarded the wisdom of ages, what heed will you give the wisdom of age ? ”

A cloud seemed to cast its shadow over the other’s face.

“ If I speak strongly,” he said, “ it is because I feel strongly. If I did not feel strongly I should not attempt to withstand the amount of testimony against me.”

“ Might I ask,” said Maskelyne, gently, in his inexplicable sympathy with the young fellow, “ why, if you feel such confidence in all you say, you do not, without hesitation, enter on a life in accordance with your convictions ? ”

At last there was hesitation in the young stranger's manner. He turned his hat nervously in his hand, and sat silent for a moment.

"You see," he began, paused, and began again—"you see, if I were alone it would be one thing. But I'm not—not at all alone," he added, evidently gaining confidence.

"Ah!" exclaimed the old lawyer, a sudden gleam of new intelligence shining in his dull, weary old eyes.

"And how am I to get married, Mr. Maskelyne?"

"The lady does not approve of your—poetical aspirations?"

"Not approve!" cried the young fellow, eagerly; "she has made me promise that I will give nothing up, that I will refuse all Mr. Bevington has arranged for me. You can't tell how inspiring our misery is. And our courage—a young Froissart must be our chronicler, sir. We take our sorrows gladly."

"And may I ask——"

"Anything, anything," interrupted the young man, gayly. "I'm sent here to be talked out of what they may call my folly. You see I can't be talked out of it. Don't that prove that it is no folly?"

"You seem," said Maskelyne, dryly, "to have settled it between you—you and she."

"Settled it! We did not need help about that. It's the unsettling. There comes a time when friends are the worst enemies. You know that, Mr. Maskelyne?"

The old lawyer paused. "Indeed I do," he said at last, and the sneer stealing over the outlines of his face slunk away before the look of regret that came swiftly on. Almost in embarrassment, with nervous hand, he shuffled the papers on his table.

Far back in the past, when his eyes were not yet dimmed by the dust blown from law-books, nor his ears deadened by the stridulous clamor of litigation, before his life had gone in attempts at

"Mastering the lawless science of our law,"

or he had lost himself in

"That codeless myriad of precedent,  
That wilderness of single instances ;"

when he, too, dwelt in that other-world of the young, forgotten by everyone but himself, but, although hardly ever remembered, never forgotten by him—not one grain of its golden sand,

not one drop of its honey-dew, not one tremor of its slightest thrill—then even he had had his romance. The freshness of the early spring morning, the airy brightness of his young visitor, himself no bad exponent of the day, the awe-footed shadow which, with almost unrecognized obtrusion, skirts the border where the ripened grain fills the field of life and nods to the ready sickle—was it something of such kind, or was it the simple story of which he had such telling intimation, that brought it all up in memory's half-tender glow? He, too, had once been in love. He, too, had written verses to his inamorata. He remembered it all now, with a smile of mingled pity and contempt. It needed no ransacking of the brain now to quicken into full view his own "It might have been"—to people once more the mystic world whose first paradise is rich in the slight garniture of glances and sighs and smiles and tears. Lost in himself, the old man forgot his visitor.

"You are very young," he said, at last, absently.

"Twenty-three," was the answer.

"And she?"

"Eighteen."

It was strange, but he, too, had been twenty-

three and she eighteen when the end came in that glimmering, gleaming past. He remembered—and how strange the recollection seemed—taking her, on her birthday, some flowers and some slight silver gift—a poor, inexpensive thing, for she would let him give no more because he too, was in debt. And now, with strange revulsion, he hardened almost into his habitual self, and grimly thought that it all was youthful nonsense, and that all such follies were very much alike. Had he spoken, he would have been guilty of one of those faults often packed with error, an apothegm—he would have said that we only become original, even in our folly, as age gives us character.

“We could be so happy with so little,” said the youthful lover.

The old man started. These were his own words many, many years ago; his very words to his guardian when the final appeal was made by old Bevington to what he called his better judgment, so very, very long ago, in the dark, stately house upon Second Avenue.

“So very little,” repeated the young man. “I have always said,” he continued, as pleased with the conceit as if it had never before glit-

tered in the song of finches of his feather, "that we should have gold enough in her hair."

"And is her hair golden?" asked Maskelyne, and, startled by the sound of such words dropped from the lips of the distinguished counsel for many a soulless corporation and many as soulless a man, he added, hurriedly, "light." And then the old lawyer remembered that he, too, had a lock of hair that he had not sent back when he returned her letters and her picture. How bright it was! What had become of it? Where was it? In what pigeon-hole, what secret drawer? He could not for the moment remember. He looked out of the window. How bright the sunshine was! How empty the world! It seemed to build up its vacancy around him as a wall.

"And she, of course, has no money?" he said, turning again.

"None."

He had been sure of it. He rose and went to the window. The joyful attributes of the morning were there, but they were no longer joyful to him. The light fell in the same broad flood, still promising the glory of summer, the ripened harvest, but there was no promise for

him. The sparrows preluded still the full-voiced singers of the year, when leaves are heavy with the dust and brooks run dry, but he heard only a quick, petulant twitter. A sort of dull despondency suddenly settled upon him. He forgot his visitor, and even time and place. Amid the glimmering lights and shaking shadows of the past, he sought a vision, as at twilight one seeks in some deserted corridor a statue which would seem to have so taken into its grain the last rays of the already sunken sun, that the marble glows in the gathering darkness with a radiance not its own.

The young man grew impatient as the reverie was prolonged. He stirred uneasily. The old lawyer turned and looked curiously at him. Of course, of course! Was a man to be changed, the bone of what he was to have its marrow drawn, the fibre of every muscle to be untwisted, by this nonsense of a boy? Of course old Bevington was right, and for the moment he did not remember that Bevington was dead—in sending the young fool to such a cool old hand as himself. But if Bevington had known what a turbulence of disappointment, discontent, and revolt had risen, and poured in strength-gathering torrent, even at



that instant, through his heart, would he not have kept his young charge away? He would talk to him—certainly he would—pave his way for him, perhaps, as with flag-stones of wisdom. Perhaps—and then he thought with grim satisfaction of what Bevington might think should he learn that he recognized that there were other paths than those edged by a curbstone.

“You have been sent to me,” he said, very seriously, coming from the window and leaning with both hands on the table, “for advice and admonition. I shall give my lesson in sternest characters. I shall teach by example, but I may not teach what you were sent here to learn. When I was as young as you—do not start, I was young once,” and he spoke with infinite sadness, “I loved as you love, and, as with you, love was returned. They who called themselves my friends strove, with what they called reason, to tear me from what they called my folly. My folly! It was the wisdom that it takes all that is blent into humanity at supremest moments to attain; their reason—the fatuous folly only enough to give habitual stir to an earth-beclotted brain! I yielded, as you have not yielded. I killed out even the natural im-

pulses of my nature. Gradually almost new instincts came, desire for delight sank into appetite for gain, hope for the joy of higher existence was lost in the ambition for mere advancement. I wrought out in myself that fearful piece of handiwork whose every effort is but to grasp the worthless handful man can only wrest from the mere world. I lost, and I have not won. I was a man and I am only a lawyer, and to him you have been sent for advice. I can find no precedent better, no authority more weighty for your guidance, than my own life. Such strength as enabled me to work such a change will also enable you to make yourself a new being, to accomplish self-overthrow, to bring you to what I am—a man rich, successful, courted, revered—most miserable. He who has so won, so lost, stands alone, or he would not so win. Choose rather the close companionship of worldly defeat, if it must be, and I say to you in the rapture of your youth, clay plastic to the moment's touch, hold to yourself, and believe that no fame, no power, no wealth, can compensate for a contentious life, an empty heart, a desolate old age. If I were you——”

He did not finish. Slowly the young

stranger rose to his full height, every lineament of his face clear in cold light. His whole aspect was one of steadfast command.

"Stop," he cried, in a stern tone. "I am yourself. No ghost walks save that which is what a man might have been. We throng the world. Beside everyone through life moves the image of a past potentiality, the thing he could have become had he held along another course. I am what you were, the promise of what you might have been. For forty years I have walked by your side. I have touched you and you have shuddered, I have chilled you and you have shrunk from me. Your nature has so grown athwart, all impulse has been so long gone, all that softens or ennobles so thrown off, that, in almost final self-assertion, what you really were or might have been, stands by your side and bids you measure stature with itself. Your life has entered upon its wintry days, but sunlight is sunshine even in December; and in youth——"

The old lawyer, almost shuddering, stepped back with repelling gesture. He passed his hand quickly across his eyes, and then, as if his heart had beat recall, summoning back every retreating force in quick rally, com-

pelled but not unwilling, he turned in combative instinct to meet the stranger face to face, nature to nature, turned—and found himself alone.

Once more the clerk opened the door.

“Eleven o’clock, sir,” he said, “and you know the General Term this morning——”

“You saw the gentleman who just went out?” asked the lawyer.

“I, sir!” answered the man, “I saw no one go out.”

“No one?”

“No one.”

“You certainly brought me a card and showed a young gentleman in a few minutes ago.”

“I, sir!” repeated the clerk. “I brought in a card and showed a young gentleman in!”

“That will do,” said Maskelyne, sternly.

As soon as he was again alone he stepped to the table. The card and the letter were gone. And still he knew he had not been dreaming. A man, swung high in the air, was busy painting a sign upon a building not far away, and he was conscious that all through the strange interview he had watched him at work. He had seen him finish one letter and then another,

and now if he found him adding the final consonant he would be assured he could not have been asleep. He looked up and found that he was right. The man had just made the heavy shaded side, and was busy putting the little finishing line at the bottom of the letter.

Two men—one of rotund middle age, the other younger but yet not young—came down the steps of the Union Club a few weeks later. They met an old man rounding the corner of the Avenue.

“See what you would come to if you had your own way,” said the elder of the two. “There’s old Maskelyne. He’s got everything you’re making yourself wretched to get. Do you want to be like him?”

“Then you haven’t heard?”

“Heard what?”

“He’s a changed man, all within a month.”

“Has his brain or his heart softened?”

“As you look at life,” said the younger. “He has sent for that clever, improvident, gracefully graceless good-fellow of a good-for-nothing, his nephew—for him and his pretty-handed, big-eyed wife—he hadn’t seen either of them since they ran away and were mar-

ried—sent for them and put them in his great, old house and—they say at the Club the nephew will have all the old man's property.”

“What's the world coming to?” said the senior, “or what is coming to the world?”

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